Closing Achievement Gaps:
An Association Guide

Affiliate Efforts

Products & Services

Tools

Research & Information

Success Stories

nea NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Great Public Schools for Every Child

NEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 2.7 million elementary and secondary teachers, education support professionals, college faculty, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

Limited copies of this guide are available for NEA members and NEA affiliate staff. Contact NEA Human and Civil Rights, 202-822-7700 or hcrinfo@nea.org.

FOREWORD

by Reg Weaver, President, and
John I. Wilson, Executive Director
National Education Association

Without question, today the number one challenge facing American public education is the achievement gaps among different students. And, also without question, NEA is committed to doing everything within its power to close these gaps.

Every one should be assured that we do not take this commitment lightly. For us, closing the achievement gaps is not just a professional responsibility, it is also a matter of conscience. Every child deserves a great public school; every child has a fundamental right to a quality education.

What's more, we make this commitment with our eyes wide open. We know that today's achievement gaps are deeply rooted in yesterday's prejudices—and that they will not be easily overcome. We also know that closing the achievement gaps will ultimately require adequate and equitable funding for all public schools—a goal that has stubbornly eluded America so far. We know, in other words, we've got our work cut out for us.

But we will never accept that girls cannot master advanced math and science courses.

We will never accept that English-language learners cannot become fluent in English and learn other subjects as well.

We will never accept that American Indian or Alaska Native students, or Asian or Pacific Islander students, cannot handle the demands of a college preparation program.

We will never accept that Black or Hispanic students cannot thrive in a rigorous academic environment.

And we will never accept that every student, including students with disabilities, cannot benefit from a full, well-rounded curriculum that includes art, music, drama, foreign languages, and physical education.

Given the opportunity, every child can learn—that's

our sun, and around it orbits all the other planets in education.

We are educators; ours is a can-do profession, and this *Closing Achievement Gaps: An Association Guide* is a can-do resource for our members. It is also the companion to the already available *C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps*, a workbook for the classroom that helps educators recognize the cultures, abilities, resilience, and effort that different students bring to learning and use them to improve their students' academic achievement.

In classroom after classroom, our members are making a difference, but their best efforts will not suffice. We cannot close the achievement gaps one classroom or one school at a time. Teachers and education support professionals cannot do it by themselves.

To close the achievement gaps, we have to "organize our strength into compelling power," as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said. Poll after poll show that the American people strongly supports increased investment in our schools, but polls don't automatically translate into policies. NEA and its allies are going to have to force the issue. We are going to have to lead. We are going to have to reach out to our communities and champion the policies that we know will close the achievement gaps: reducing class sizes, recruiting and retaining quality teachers by paying professional salaries, supplying every school with up-to-date books and technologies, and providing the programs and services to meet the full range of children's needs.

As educators in 2006, our message to the policymakers is much like Winston Churchill's message to America during the Battle of Britain in 1941: "Give us the tools, and we will finish the job."

We hope this Guide will make you a more powerful achievement gaps closer.

Reg Weaver, President
National Education Association

John I. Wilson, Executive Director
National Education Association

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BEING RESPONSIVE

NEA is taking a leadership role in improving achievement for all students and closing the achievement gaps, particularly for low income and minority students. To do this, we must effectively apply and coordinate our resources in collaboration with affiliates and external partners toward efforts that will close the gaps.

In this chapter, we will examine:

1. Why NEA is focusing on closing achievement gaps.
2. NEA's framework for approaching this work.

FOCUS ON THE GAPS

There are a number of reasons why NEA is focusing on closing achievement gaps as part of its work.

- Public and parent expectations are placing increasing pressure on our members to close the gaps.

- While student demographics are changing dramatically, teacher demographics—both gender and race—are remaining static and are not reflecting the demographics of the student population.

- Closing the gaps is vital if we are to maintain a productive workforce in the future.

- Teachers and paraeducators play a critical role in closing the gaps, and our members expect NEA to help them address educational accountability measures at the state and federal levels.

- Last, but not least, focusing on closing achievement gaps is the right thing to do in order to help all students achieve equity and have access to a quality education.

Through actions taken at NEA's annual Representative Assembly, through recommendations in NEA committee reports, and through governance recommendations, members and leaders have told the Association that this work is important to them and they want it to be a focus for the Association, as well.

WHY ACHIEVEMENT GAPS AND NOT GAP?

NEA identifies achievement gaps because we choose to include the many students who may not be achieving at the high standards needed to be successful. Most of us are familiar with the gaps defined by student characteristics including:

- Race/ethnicity
- Income levels
- Language background
- Disability status
- Gender

In addition, we recognize that, across these categories, gaps are evidenced in a variety of data, including but not limited to:

- Performance: Who is scoring at the proficient or above levels on standardized state assessments, the National Assessment for Educational Progress, or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)?

- Access: Who is enrolled in Advanced Placement classes, who has access to algebra in the middle grades, who is taking college preparatory classes?

- Attainment: Who actually graduates on time, goes on to college or technical training, completes postsecondary education, or attains advanced degrees?

Students have a wide variety of education experiences across the U.S. and NEA's achievement gaps work is intended to shine a spotlight on where the gaps are and how to address them.

For more information about NEA's achievement gaps work, contact NEA Student Achievement at (202) 822-7350.

The causes of the achievement gaps are multiple and interrelated. They include the effects of poverty, home and community learning opportunities, discrimination, access to health care, and issues of housing and mobility. Education plays an important—but far from solo—role in closing achievement gaps.

What are the achievement gaps? Achievement gaps exist when groups of students with relatively equal ability do not achieve in school at the same levels; in fact, one group often far exceeds the achievement levels of others. Gaps in achievement exist across the nation and can be found based upon race/ethnicity, income levels, language background, disability status, and gender.

Despite the current focus on state test scores, it is important to remember that gaps are evidenced in a variety of data, including:

- Performance on the national and state tests, classroom assessments, and other measures that affect performance, such as tardiness and absences;
- Access to key courses (e.g., algebra) and educational opportunities (e.g., advanced placement courses, calculus, higher education);
- Attainments such as high school diplomas and GEDs, college degrees, academic honors, and employment histories after high school and college.

The tool "Achievement Gaps Matrix" (page 24) can help in identifying these gaps. Chapter 3 will discuss these gaps in more detail.

NEA's Achievement Gaps Web Site

NEA has created a Web site specifically focused on closing the achievement gaps: www.achievementgaps.org. Members will find several resources here to help them in their work:

- Articles and research on effective strategies to use in closing achievement gaps;
- Discussion boards to talk to other members around the country and share ideas;
- Announcements and news items related to closing the gaps;
- Professional development opportunities;
- PDF files for members to download the latest NEA products and resources.

NEA's Approach to Closing Achievement Gaps

NEA has developed a framework that guides our work on closing the achievement gaps. The framework focuses on three areas: voice, advocacy, and affiliate engagement and support. We also encourage affiliates to develop their own voice, advocacy, and affiliate engagement and support efforts.

Voice focuses on how we deliver the message of public schools and the work we are doing to close the achievement gaps. NEA's focus on voice includes holding a series of forums with leading researchers on strategies for closing the gaps, talking about the gaps work in speeches by Association leaders, supporting the development of publications by noted experts in education, a series of webcasts on educational issues, presentations at all NEA regional conferences, and regular articles in *NEA Today.*

NEA's *advocacy* around closing the achievement gaps addresses our efforts to change policy at the local, state, and national levels. In addition, advocacy involves securing federal, state, and private funding in collaboration with partners to leverage our achievement gaps work. Examples of our advocacy include proposed federal and state legislation addressing the achievement gaps and developing partnerships with national organizations and policymakers. In addition, advocacy involves developing collective bargaining agreements that support the inclusion of working conditions that improve student outcomes as well as linkages to work supported by grants from the NEA Foundation to our members and affiliates.

Affiliate engagement and support is how NEA provides resources, staff, funding of state and local projects, and materials in support of affiliates' work with members to close the gaps. Examples of affiliate engagement and support include products, programs, and other resources, including this guide, developed by NEA that will help affiliates address achievement gaps issues, collect data from states about the work that is underway, and share examples of best practices for closing achievement gaps. The publication *C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps* (http://www.nea.org/teachexperience/careguide.html), training modules for working with English-language learners, and a Web site on closing the achievement gaps (www.achievementgaps.org) are examples of some of the products and resources developed by NEA to help close the achievement gaps.

NEA's Approach to Closing Achievement Gaps

Voice

Advocacy

Affiliate Engagement & Support
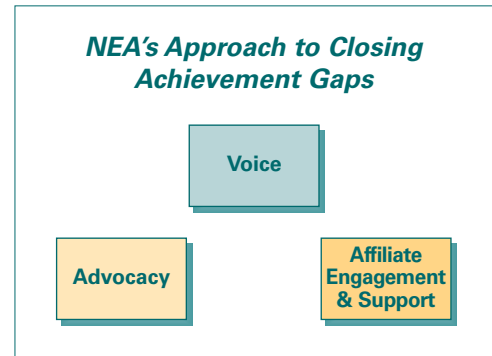
SUSTAINING THE EFFORT

- Gather data on the achievement gaps in your community, using the "Achievement Gaps Matrix" (page 24).
- Analyze the data carefully and identify the best strategies for closing the gaps. "Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps" (page 18-19) provides a number of approaches.
- Use the information in chapters 3-5 to develop your affiliate's voice, plan your advocacy role, and devise your engagement and support activities in order to close the achievement gaps.

NEA RESOLUTIONS CONNECTED TO CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

(from "Excellence and Equity: Closing the Student Achievement Gap" from the NEA Professional Standards and Practices committee, 2004)

NEA resolutions support the elimination of differential achievement opportunities. These resolutions include statements in which NEA–

- opposes tracking based on socioeconomic status, race, or gender (1988);
- supports smaller class sizes (1982);
- supports academic achievement for all students (1998);
- calls for equal opportunities in mathematics and science for women and minorities (1992);
- supports early childhood education (1972);
- advances strategies for attracting qualified and experienced teachers for low-performing schools (2001).

SUMMARY

Members are looking to NEA and our affiliates to provide them with support and resources for closing the achievement gaps. Using the framework of voice, advocacy, and affiliate engagement and support, we can develop the policies, services, and products that will help those members succeed.

Closing the achievement gaps is a shared responsibility that requires the involvement of students, parents, teachers, education support professionals, administrators, community members, and policymakers. It isn't easy, and it won't happen overnight. This association guide focuses on helping affiliates engage in the achievement gaps work as part of your long-term strategic plan and as you take a leadership role that supports the work of NEA members in schools and school districts.

Throughout this guide, we note a few strategies intended to help sustain the efforts begun in each chapter. We include these because many times a lot of activity erupts in the wake of an emergency such as the identification of a school or district failing to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) or otherwise not reaching academic goals. After the immediate crisis passes (e.g., the school comes off "the list"), the activity flags and business returns to normal. We have included a few ideas to keep the activity moving beyond the crisis to ensure the improvement persists. These suggestions will be set off in a sidebar marked "Sustaining the Effort."

PREPARING TO CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

The task of closing achievement gaps rests on a foundation that affiliates can build by addressing the issues outlined in this chapter. Each of the issues relates to this key question: What is our role as an affiliate in closing the achievement gaps?

In this chapter we address the following fundamental issues:

1. Local and state affiliates' missions and how they relate to your association's role in closing the achievement gaps;

2. The needs and expectations of your primary stakeholders related to the gaps and your association's role in meeting those needs and expectations;

3. Other stakeholders who have an interest in closing the gaps;

4. Implications for your association goals;

5. Plans for how you will assess your progress in meeting these goals.

The important work of closing achievement gaps rests on the shared responsibility of members, leaders, and association staff to help every student succeed. National Education Association (NEA) members are some of the most caring and committed individuals in the world—their profession demands it. These teachers and education support professionals (ESPs) work in some of the most challenging—and often rewarding—environments imaginable, usually for low pay and under questionable working conditions. Their common bond is that they care about children and want to see their students succeed.

NEA members take their responsibilities seriously and look to their association to help them close the achievement gaps for the children they work with every day. Local and state associations, in turn, can build capacity to address the issues related to closing the achievement gaps, and they have the ability to bring all of the key stakeholders together to develop an agenda that will support this work. In addition to NEA programs and products that will help affiliates achieve success (see chapter 5), NEA regional offices can provide support and assistance to affiliates.

ENGAGE IN KEY INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS

Local and state affiliates play an integral role in closing the achievement gaps. Preparing for this role requires that affiliates engage in two kinds of conversations:

1. *Internal* conversations within affiliates, involving members, leaders, and staff;

2. *External* conversations with school districts, state departments of education, and local communities.

WHAT IS SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is the full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. It includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure, and individuals are both self-determining and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their capabilities as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole.

Adapted from Marianne Adams, LeAnne Bell, and Pat Griffin in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (Routledge, 1995).

The purpose of these conversations is to create a common vision for closing the gaps, thus laying the groundwork for collaboration among stakeholders. This chapter addresses the internal conversations while chapter 4 looks at external conversations.

Internal conversations should begin with an assessment and examination of the affiliate's core values. In this process, leaders and staff will need to think deeply and honestly about the following questions:

- What is our mission and how does it relate to closing achievement gaps?
- What do our members and other stakeholders need and expect from us on this issue?

In addition, affiliates are well-advised to examine the connections between governance documents (constitution, bylaws, resolutions, etc.), association priorities (goals, strategic plan, budget, legislative agenda, etc.), and the products provided for members (contracts, memoranda of understanding, public relations campaigns, professional development opportunities, etc.). What do the products of your association say about how your purpose and values reinforce the activities to close achievement gaps? For state associations, internal conversations should include an assessment and examination of how to best serve the needs of local affiliates as well as members in closing the gaps.

EXAMINE—AND PERHAPS REVISE—YOUR MISSION

Traditionally, the role of the association, especially at the local level, is to connect school personnel, bargain contracts, process grievances, lobby for progressive education legislation, provide liability insurance, and provide members with professional development opportunities. But more and more local and state associations have been leading education reform efforts within their school districts and states, working in partnerships to close achievement gaps. For some, it is a logical outcome of improving teaching and learning conditions for members and students. For others, it is related to the association's role in promoting social justice by addressing issues of poverty, race, class, and equality of opportunity.

Affiliates that are well-positioned to work on closing achievement gaps have taken an unflinching look at their values and core beliefs to develop, review, and/or revise their mission statements. These affiliates see their mission as focused on making things better for members and students. They eagerly acknowledge their role in ensuring that all students have access to a high quality education that will prepare them to be productive, successful adults.

As we will discuss in chapter 3, the mission statement provides a foundation for affiliates' voice related to closing achievement gaps. Your voice on this issue—a clear, brief, powerful message that can be advanced through a range of communications activities—is grounded in the values and beliefs contained in your mission statement.

By answering the questions below, you can take the steps that are necessary to ensure that your mission statement supports your organizational efforts, and the efforts of your members, to close achievement gaps:

Questions for affiliates:

1. Do we have a mission statement?
2. How does our mission relate to school improvement, closing the achievement gaps, and supporting public education?
3. Is the mission widely known and used to drive our work or is it just "words on the wall?"
4. State affiliates: How does the mission relate to supporting local affiliates in closing achievement gaps?

Mission statements codify the organization's identity—how it sees itself and wants to be seen by others. As a result, members understandably have strong sentiments about what the mission says.

In addition, associations that engage in this internal conversation as they prepare for community conversations can increase their clout in forming collaborative relationships for closing the gaps. Local presidents, for example, would be in a better position following these internal conversations to use the "Checklist for a Local Association President" (page 8), which is one approach to beginning conversations focused on helping struggling schools in their local.

CHECKLIST FOR A LOCAL ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

You have just learned that one, or more, school in your district is in danger of failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). What actions should you take?

✓ Call the association representative(s) and principal(s) at the school(s) to let them know the association is aware of the situation. Inform them of your plans to meet with the superintendent. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss how the district plans to support the school(s) that has been so identified. Let the school(s) know you will be inviting the association representative(s) and principal(s) to a meeting to strategize on next steps and association support.

✓ Notify your state affiliate of the situation and ask for help.

✓ Call the superintendent, as soon as possible, to arrange a meeting.

✓ At the meeting with the superintendent, make an effort to work cooperatively and reach consensus on issues such as:

  a) Establishing a climate that is oriented toward solutions, not blame;

  b) Collaborating with the school staff to develop a process and plan for addressing the gaps;

  c) Ensuring that students and parents are fully engaged in closing the gaps;

  d) Ensuring that decision making is driven by disaggregated data;

  e) Ensuring that schools analyze a variety of data, not just test scores;

  f) Planning a working session with the superintendent, affected principal(s), and association representative(s).

✓ Examine relevant documents to identify issues that will either support or hinder your efforts to close achievement gaps. Documents to examine include:

  a) Employee bargaining contracts or memoranda of understanding;

  b) School board policies;

  c) State statutes;

  d) Association governance documents;

  e) District budget priorities.

✓ Meet with the association representative(s) and principal(s) from the affected school(s) to provide association support and identify areas of concern and next steps such as:

  a) The planning process for improvement at the school;

  b) How to deal with the publicity the school may get;

  c) Association resources that are available for schools to access;

  d) What schools need from the district and the association;

  e) Collaboration with the community.

✓ Meet with association governance and staff to discuss issues generated at the meeting with the association representative(s) and principal(s) and develop a plan of action:

  a) Address requests or issues that conflict with current association policy;

  b) Address requests that affect the association's budget;

  c) Plan for association response and activities, including utilization of staff;

  d) Develop public relations materials—internal and external.

✓ Develop a plan for community outreach, including the development of partnerships to support school success, publicity, communication with parent and community groups, and coalition building.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Affiliates serve a variety of stakeholders: members, nonmembers, school districts, community organizations, parents, and students are all stakeholders of one kind or another. Members who pay dues and set policy are local associations' primary stakeholders. Local associations are state affiliates' primary stakeholders, followed closely by members.

- What does your primary stakeholder need and expect from you related to closing achievement gaps?
- How does that stakeholder see your affiliate in connection to closing the gaps?

Members join the association for a variety of reasons. Many educators join your affifliate for the legal protection offered through local contracts and NEA's liability insurance—traditional union services. But association polls show that most new members' interests—and those of many existing members—go beyond traditional unionism. Instead, they look to the association as a way to connect to a network of professionals who will help them deal with issues related to their professional practice, their role vis-à-vis district and school administrators, and their personal and professional advocacy for students.

Successful affiliates recognize and meet the needs of these members/stakeholders who seek support in their daily work of teaching and caring for students. Indeed, members are the first to address district, state, and federal policies related to student achievement, and they are the ones who "take the hit" when test scores are low and schools are labeled as "failing." Moreover, members look to the association to lobby legislatures and school boards, bargain contract language, and provide the professional support members need to succeed in their work with students. Specific ways affiliates can address professional development are addressed in chapter 5. The other interests—negotiating and lobbying—are covered in chapter 4.

New members also are drawn to the association by specific educational issues in which they are interested and by belief that collective action on these issues can make a difference. Successful affiliates identify the particular concerns of their members and potential members and then address these concerns throughout their organizational structure. As we discuss in chapter 5, affiliates can organize their initiatives to close achievement gaps around a variety of issues important to these members.

While closing achievement gaps is a priority for a local or state affiliate, is it a priority for members? Affiliates can gather this information in a variety of ways. One local affiliate in Florida, developed a computer-based tracking system to gather data. Feedback from association representatives can provide valuable data. Member surveys and focus groups also can provide systematic information about members' opinions on closing the gaps and

NEA OPSCAN SURVEYS

NEA Research has launched a Web site where leaders and staff can learn more about surveys, tools, and support available to state and local associations free of charge.

The site describes the 23 surveys, organized under 12 topic areas, that affiliate leaders can use to gather information on the opinions and priorities of members. Through the OPSCAN Surveys Program, affiliates have access to a fast and efficient technology that scans forms, tabulates data, and creates reports. Visit the new OPSCAN site at http://connect.nea.org/opscan/index.html and

- Learn more about how the OPSCAN Surveys Program works;
- Review the surveys that are currently available;
- View samples of data reports generated for each survey;
- Extract survey questions that can be used to design your own survey.

Have questions? Affiliates can contact NEA Research at (202) 822-7400 for more information.

their interest in having the association work on this issue. NEA Research has developed a variety of online surveys for affiliates' use (sidebar, page 9).

We suggest that state affiliates take time to consider your local affiliates' needs by addressing these questions:

1. What do your local associations need, and expect, from you as they work with members to close achievement gaps?
2. What role(s) do local associations see you playing?
3. Where does closing the gaps fit into your local associations' lists of priorities?

We suggest local affiliates ask:

1. What do your members need, and expect, from you as they work to close achievement gaps?
2. What role(s) do they see you playing in closing the gaps?
3. Where does closing the gaps fit into your list of priorities?

The sidebar on this page shares how the Seattle Education Association used surveys to shape bargaining language that supports closing the achievement gaps.

Remember there is a range of factors that contribute to the achievement gaps. Some of these can be influenced by our members and the association, but others are outside our sphere of influence. Focus your work on the areas you can influence and use the areas outside of your influence to begin conversations and build partnerships. Chapter 3 will discuss these factors in more detail.

The task of closing achievement gaps does not fall to the association alone. Indeed, closing achievement gaps is a shared responsibility that requires the involvement of educators, the community, and policymakers. As you prepare to take on this important work, we encourage you to identify other key local and state level organizations that have an interest, or stake, in closing the gaps, or who may be actively engaged in activities that address the gaps.

BARGAINING TO CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

The Seattle Education Association (SEA) used two surveys of members to lay the groundwork for bargaining their contract language on closing achievement gaps. They first conducted a "Bargaining Environment Inventory" that measured issues of workload, staff relationships, effectiveness of administrators, decision making, trust, and direction for SEA to take. The results of this survey, along with data gathered at building meetings, building representative training sessions, leadership meetings, and other venues, led to the SEA "Bargaining Priority Survey." In addition to surveying members on more traditional bread and butter issues, it examined strategies for closing the achievement gaps and supporting staff serving higher risk students. Members were asked to rate their level of support for interventions such as:

- Establishing small learning communities;
- Providing support for developing cultural competency in curriculum and school environments;
- Providing transfer bonuses to staff who transfer to high risk schools.

The results of this survey were used to craft the bargaining package, identify priorities for negotiations, and led to ground-breaking contract language and a partnership between SEA and the Seattle Public Schools on closing the achievement gaps. For more information on the surveys, contact SEA Executive Director Steve Pulkkinen at (206) 283-8443 or SPulkkinen@washingtonea.org.

IDENTIFYING EXTERNAL KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Use this checklist to help you identify key local and state level organizations or groups that the association can partner with to address closing the achievement gaps. List key contacts or known allies for each group.

■ Parents and/or parent organizations: _____

■ School principals: _____

■ District superintendent: _____

■ Other key district staff: _____

■ Local school board: _____

■ Local business groups: _____

■ Civic and community service organizations: _____

■ Civil rights organizations: _____

■ Child welfare and/or advocacy organizations: _____

■ Social service agencies: _____

■ Churches and other religious organizations: _____

■ State board of education: _____

■ State department of education: _____

■ Other local or state level organizations representing educators: _____

■ Other district groups, bargaining units, etc.: _____

■ Other: _____

_____

_____

_____

CONSIDER IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSOCIATION GOALS

Association goals—the major endpoints that direct your work to close achievement gaps— should be driven by several pieces of data. These include what you have gathered to date about your mission, your primary stakeholders' expectations, and the expectations of other stakeholders with an interest in closing the gaps (and who may be actively engaged in this work). Other information, such as which students are experiencing conditions leading to achievement gaps—which we cover in chapter 3—also is needed to formulate realistic, measurable goals that can guide your efforts to close achievement gaps.

What are the implications of your mission for the goals of your affiliate? If, for example, part of your mission is to engage your members with communities to ensure that all students learn and succeed in a diverse world, then your *goals* should transform the lofty, big-picture view of where you want the organization to go that is contained in your mission statement into something that is more specific, measurable, and attainable.

As important, consider information from your primary stakeholders about their needs and expectations related to closing achievement gaps. For example, what role do they see your affiliate playing? What specific needs (e.g., instructional, advocacy, professional development, policy) do they have related to closing the gaps? Which of these needs can your affiliate meet? A disconnect between mission, stakeholder needs, and goals could lead to problems as you move an initiative to close the achievement gaps along, including loss of credibility with members and other stakeholders who are also working to close the gaps.

When you are ready to develop association goals for closing the achievement gaps in your local or state, we suggest that you:

1. Create a task force or work group composed of members, leaders, and staff.
2. Encourage the task force to establish some operational ground rules to ensure that everyone participates and the group completes its work in a timely manner. (See "Facilitation Techniques" below.)
3. Ask the task force to analyze the information gathered from stakeholders, put it into an association context, identify other groups with an interest in closing the gaps, and develop a mix of short-term and long-term goals for the association. See the tool "Developing Association Goals for Closing the Achievement Gaps" on page 17 for more details.

The Indiana State Teachers Association is part of an education roundtable pushing for legislation to close the achievement gaps in Indiana. In "Knights of the Roundtable: The Indiana State Teachers Association," they share how this work connects to their mission and their work for members.

GROUP FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

Effective groups don't just "happen"—they take planning and leadership. Here are some techniques and strategies to remember when facilitating any work group.

Develop Shared Ownership

- Help the group establish norms.
- Negotiate how to spend discussion time.
- Negotiate tasks to be accomplished between meetings.
- Encourage a climate that fosters participation.
- Draw out and explore diverse perspectives and ideas.
- Confront relevant controversial issues.
- Bring knowledge of issues related to achievement gaps to the discussion.

Manage the Group's Time Efficiently

- Keep the group on task.
- Establish an agenda with the group and stick to it.
- Hold members accountable for doing agreed upon work.
- Energize group discussions.
- Observe and balance participation.
- Set aside personal perspectives to better understand others' viewpoints.
- Summarize meetings, especially decisions, and next steps.

Engage in Effective Discussions

- Ask probing questions to clarify ambiguous issues.
- Promote active listening by all group participants.
- Direct the discussion to the next topic when the group has exhausted a particular topic.
- Periodically summarize the group's thinking, progress, and decisions.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

KNIGHTS OF THE ROUNDTABLE: THE INDIANA STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

"We're not knights in shining armor— we've really just scratched the surface. But we've put the pieces in place to address the issues."

— **Dan Clark**, deputy director, Indiana State Teachers Association

CHALLENGE

For the state of Indiana, the urgency of closing the achievement gaps is more than an academic discussion. Faced with a population that is aging faster than the national average—proportionally fewer younger people—and a higher decline in manufacturing than any other state, Indiana knows that what's at stake is nothing less than its future economic viability.

"The key challenge is that the state population is not growing fast enough . . .," says Dan Clark, deputy director of the Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA). "We don't have enough young people, so we won't have a highly skilled workforce sufficient to sustain our economy if we don't fix the gaps. We can't have an economic rebirth if we don't have skilled young people."

ENVIRONMENT

Recognizing that a high quality education system is essential to a prosperous future, Indiana set a deliberate path to establishing high academic standards, assessing student progress, and addressing the challenges of closing the gaps in student achievement.

"Indiana was already on the path of revising standards before 'No Child Left Behind,'" says Judith Briganti, president of ISTA. In 1999, state laws mandated a continuous school improvement and achievement plan and created the Education Roundtable. Co-chaired by the governor and the superintendent of Public Instruction, the Education Roundtable is a 42-member group of K–12 educators; business, labor, and community leaders; parents; and members of the Indiana General Assembly charged with making recommendations to the state department of education for improving academic standards, especially in high priority schools.

"By the time NCLB came around, the Roundtable had already approved the standards, and the state department of education had already done a good job in the writing of the standards," says Briganti. "Our teachers had already begun putting our standards in

the curriculum to make sure alignment had begun, and we were well on our way to implementing a standards-based curriculum and assessments."

"There had been school reform legislation passed in 1987 that mandated the use of norm-referenced tests," explains Clark, "but we worked on false assumptions. We didn't expose gaps information for about a decade because we kept standards very low. As long as we compared ourselves to poorer parts of the country we looked pretty good." Once the standards were raised in 1999, says Clark, "the gaps became ubiquitous and evident."

The accountability system now in place looks at the progress of students over time and from year to year. "We now have the disaggregation of data in our standards that we need," says Clark, "and we are not shying away from that."

ACTIONS

The Education Roundtable, in October 2003, adopted the P16 Education Plan for Improving Student Achieve-ment. Among the plan's 10 key components are three strategies that address the achievement gaps head on. They include:

- Targeted preschool and full-day kindergarten;
- Extensive reading support systems;
- Extensive support programs for English-language learners (ELLs).

About one-third of Indiana's students qualify for the federal school lunch program, 17 percent qualify for special education. Indiana has a total minority population of 11 percent, and 3 percent of students are English-language learners. Statewide, more than 30 percent of Indiana's students struggle to achieve proficiency in the standards, but the nonproficiency rate is nearly double for some student subgroups, says Clark.

"We can't wait 10 years for preschools to take effect," he says, "so the plan also includes middle and high school drop-out prevention programs."

ISTA worked with the chair of the House Education Committee for three years to draft legislation to implement the strategies proposed in the P16 Education Plan to eliminate the achievement gaps, but the bill has never gotten a hearing because of Indiana's dire budget situation and the change of power after the 2005 election.

While the plan specifically addresses strategies for closing the achievement gaps, teachers feel there may not be a reality check for the classroom, says Briganti. "I'm so concerned that we'll pass this program then cherry pick—certain programs will be promoted but early childhood initiatives, for example, will get dropped." The P16 Education Plan is detailed in full on the ISTA Web site (http://www.ista-in.org).

ASSOCIATION INVOLVEMENT

ISTA, which represents 50,000 educators statewide, helped to enact the 1999 school accountability legislation, and the Association continues to have a seat at the Education Roundtable as the P16 Education Plan moves forward.

"Our involvement in the legislation was important in order to protect collective bargaining and teachers' rights," says Briganti.

With NEA support, ISTA funded a seven-month education adequacy study to determine the funding level necessary for Indiana students to receive an adequate education. Using a professional judgment approach, the study created three prototype school panels, three district panels, and a single expert panel to identify resources the K–12 schools would need to help students meet state standards. Released in 2002, the study concluded that "Indiana's state and local funding along with the other sources currently available does not add up to the... recommended level of spending for basic costs, special education, and hard-to-serve students."

In partnership with the Indianapolis Urban League, ISTA created the Indiana Consortium to Eliminate Achievement Gaps. Working in concert with the NAACP, the Indianapolis Black Legislative Caucus, the Indiana School Principals Association, the Indianapolis Association of Public School Superintendents, the Indiana University School of Education, and other education and community-based organizations, the Consortium analyzes and disseminates achievement gaps research, supports the implementation of best practices, engages and educates the community around the gaps, and shares information through its Web site, www.iceag.org.

ISTA continues to advocate for passage and full funding of the P16 Education Plan through its legislative program, letter-writing campaigns, publications, and member communications.

"Treading water doesn't work," says Briganti. "I'm very proud of our communication with our members. Posting information on the Web site isn't enough."

ISTA keeps members regularly informed of the Plan's progress through conferences, e-mails, and other member communications. When ISTA developed an e-mail database of volunteers to gather feedback on standards and to get the word out on student achievement issues, over 500 members responded.

As well, ISTA has published a number of resources to keep members and other stakeholders focused on the mission of closing the achievement gaps for Indiana students. The cover story of the Winter 2005 issue of the *ISTA Advocate* magazine, for example, features ISTA goals for the 2005 General Assembly, which include funding of the P16 Education Plan, modifications to the standards and accountability mandates, and flexibility in carrying them out.

ISTA also has created tools to help stakeholders synthesize the overwhelming, complex data available on the achievement gaps. *Achievement Gaps in Indiana 2002–2003* provides step-by-step directions for obtaining and understanding gaps information using the data from the state department of education, and *Superior Achievement by All Students* spells out 22 research-based strategies to eliminate the gaps. ISTA created user-friendly CDs that capture DOE data and make it meaningful for parents, community members, and legislators.

"What we have done is take the department of education data and redesign what they did," says Clark. "We can produce data for any state legislator and put that information directly in front of them."

Biggest Successes So Far

Indiana's standards have been assessed as among the best in the country. The state's accountability plan is one of only five to receive early federal approval under NCLB. While ISTA continues to garner statewide support for closing the gaps, the ability to fund key initiatives remains a primary obstacle.

On April 20, 2005, ISTA joined NEA, nine school districts, and the Reading (Pennsylvania) Education Association in filing a lawsuit in federal court.* The lawsuit seeks to enforce a promise that Congress made to states and school districts when it enacted NCLB— namely that states and school districts would not be required to spend their own money on the law's rules and regulations. The lawsuit asks the courts to prevent the U.S. Department of Education from denying federal funds to states and school districts that refuse to spend their own money on the law's regulations.

"We are absolutely not opposed to the standards and accountability required in NCLB," says Briganti, "but this law requires the federal government to pay for its education regulations and mandates, and it isn't honoring that requirement. The U.S. Department of Education insists that states and school districts follow all NCLB regulations, even though the federal government has not come close to providing the funds needed to do so as the law requires."

What's the prognosis for the future?

"We take two steps forward and three steps back," says Briganti. "We have good data that early childhood initiatives will help us close the achievement gaps over time, but budget cuts demoralize morale."

Along with the budget cuts, the new state administration apparently intends to redirect the work of the Education Roundtable away from implementation of the P16 Education Plan. The proponents of high standards have yet to fulfill their commitment to provide a fair chance for all children to succeed, says Clark. Like NCLB, a legal challenge to redress achievement gaps in Indiana is imminent.

"We're not knights in shining armor, "says Clark. "We've really just scratched the surface. But we've put the pieces in place to address the issues."

Contact:

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Dan Clark, deputy director, Indiana State Teachers Association: dclark@ista-in.org, (317) 263-3362; www.ista-in.org.

* The lawsuit was in the appeals process as this publication went to press.

DEVELOPING ASSOCIATION GOALS FOR CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Here are some steps for your work group to consider as you develop your association's goals.

Analyze the information you have gathered through surveys and other tools. Ground what you intend to do to close achievement gaps in the information, data, and evidence you have gathered so that your goals really do address key needs. Ask:

1. What picture has emerged based on the identification of students who are experiencing achievement gaps and the factors that contribute to those gaps?

2. Does the information that has been gathered and reviewed point to any logical or high priority place to begin efforts to close the gaps?

Put this information into an Association context. The information you just analyzed may well provide evidence of more than one achievement gap—and more than one group of students may be involved. To make matters more complex, a variety of factors may contribute to the gaps. One way to sift through all this information—and begin to narrow your focus to what you can do to address the gaps—is to put the information into an association context. To that end, ask:

1. What are your association's concerns and interests around the gaps?

2. How does the mission statement you developed, reviewed, and/or modified relate to closing achievement gaps?

3. How are the needs and expectations of your affiliate's primary stakeholders related to closing the gaps, and what is your association's role in closing them?

4. Are there gaps (and contributing factors) that are most amenable to intervention, or that are the "best bets" to address, given the state and/or local context?

5. Which gaps (and contributing factors) are most important to address in the opinion of your leaders, staff, and members?

Identify existing community organizations and groups that have an interest or stake in closing achievement gaps, especially the specific gaps you have identified as your association's priorities. Be careful to avoid simply repeating what other organizations are doing or—worse—working at cross-purposes. Ask:

1. What are these organizations doing to close the gaps? What are their priorities? What initiatives or programs do they have in place?

2. What are their goals related to closing achievement gaps?

3. Which gaps (and contributing factors) are you best positioned to address—either alone or in concert with others, or that mesh with your current association priorities, policy, and/or programs?

4. Which gaps (and contributing factors) have other stakeholders identified as high priorities for them? Are these the same as, different than, or complementary to the gaps that you have identified?

Develop a mix of short-term and long-term goals so that you can stack up some immediate "wins" in closing the gaps as well as undertake longer-term work that may affect the gaps in the long run. Make sure you identify goals that are unique to your association as well as goals you will attend to by working with other stakeholders.

1. What are realistic, attainable annual and multi-year goals that you can establish for closing achievement gaps?

2. Which of these goals can you attain on your own, in cooperation with other stakeholders, through partnerships or other collaborative arrangements?

The tool on page 18, "Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps," offers a variety of strategies around which you could develop association goals.

STRATEGIES FOR CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

After you examine the data for your school or district, you can begin to identify the best strategies for you to use for closing the gaps. As you discuss these strategies, keep in mind (a) which strategies are already in place; (b) what resources are needed to implement new strategies; and (c) what new actions are needed. Below are strategies you may consider using.

Enhanced Cultural Competence

- Consider students' diversity to be an asset
- Increase faculty's cultural competence
- Be sensitive to students' home cultures
- Understand and capitalize on students' culture, abilities, resilience, and effort

Comprehensive Support for Students

- Screen children early for medical/social services
- Work with medical, social services, and community agencies
- Identify students who need additional instructional support
- Support students via mentors, tutoring, peer support networks, and role models

Outreach to Students' Families

- Make sure the main office is family friendly
- Engage/reach out to students' families
- Establish family centers at schools and other community locations
- Hire staff from the community who speak families' home languages
- Provide transportation to and from school events
- Conduct adult education and parenting courses at local schools

Extended Learning Opportunities

- Institute full day kindergarten and pre-kindergarten
- Reorganize the instructional day to maximize time for learning
- Extend learning to before- and after-school programs as well as summer programs

Classrooms that Support Learning

- Use varied, effective strategies to instruct diverse learners
- Use test and other information on students' performance in instructional planning
- Target literacy and math instruction, if needed
- Safeguard instructional time
- Use research and data to improve practice

Supportive Schools

- Make closing gaps a schoolwide responsibility
- Set high expectations and provide rigorous, deep curricula
- Focus on academics
- Provide safe, orderly learning environments for students and educators
- Use test data and other research on students' performance to inform instruction
- Identify strategies and programs to increase achievement
- Develop effective schoolwide leadership teams
- Provide ongoing professional development for school-based leaders on effective strategies for closing the achievement gaps

Strong District Support

- Make closing achievement gaps a district priority
- Develop an effective leadership team
- Provide additional resources and support for students experiencing achievement gaps
- Engage teachers in strengthening curriculum and student assessments
- Decrease class sizes
- Provide schools with timely test and other assessment information

STRATEGIES FOR CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS (CONTINUED)

- Involve teachers in the design of ongoing professional development
- Disseminate the latest research on effective strategies to schools

- Prepare teacher leaders to be knowledgeable and effective on school reform
- Help teachers work effectively with families and communities

Access to Qualified Staff

- Improve teacher education programs
- Recruit, develop, and retain qualified teachers and paraeducators
- Attract high quality staff to work with students with the greatest needs
- Compensate teachers who take on extra responsibilities
- Provide time for faculty to meet and plan
- Provide continuous, data-driven professional development

Adequate Resources and Funding

- Seek adequate and equitable funding
- Target resources on closing the gaps
- Expand school capacity via additional resources
- Engage businesses, universities, foundations in schools' work
- Seek federal, state, or private funding in collaboration with partners to leverage NEA programs

Schools that close achievement gaps focus on improving learning for all students, maintain a "no excuses" attitude, use research and data to improve practice, involve everyone in improvement processes, persist through difficulties and setbacks, and celebrate accomplishments.

BEGIN PLANNING HOW TO ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS

Assessing the extent to which your association meets its goals for closing the gaps is as important as setting measurable, attainable goals in the first place. In fact, a large part of the strategic planning process—and that's what all these questions really lead you to conduct—is identifying what success looks like, specifying how you will assess progress on meeting your goals and processes, and collecting and analyzing the data on the results of your work. Just as we are asking schools to make data-driven decisions, your affiliate can do the same and be able to assess its progress using data.

These issues are all interconnected—one question leads to the next and connects in a cycle of continuous improvement and continuous examination. In essence, we are suggesting thinking "up front" about how your work related to closing the gaps will inform your association's ongoing learning and improvement—a notion grounded in several approaches, including those outlined in "Affiliates as Learning Organizations" below.

AFFILIATES AS LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

In 2002, a group of association leaders, staff, and members interested in continuous improvement and the application of the Baldrige principles to educational organizations and settings formed the Learning Cooperative, Inc. Today, the Learning Cooperative is an open, vibrant community of learners committed to improving educational institutions by acquiring, creating, disseminating, and coaching knowledge about high-performing organizations.

The work of the Cooperative focuses on helping members in four key areas:

1. *Learning*: acquiring existing knowledge about high-performing organizations;
2. *Research and Development:* creating new knowledge about high-performing organizations;
3. *Dissemination:* widely distributing knowledge about high-performing organizations through digital and print media;
4. *Coaching:* helping others use knowledge about high-performing organizations.

The Learning Cooperative provides a variety of products and services, including:

- A continuous improvement coaching and learning handbook, coaching and learning logs, case studies, organizational assessments, and quarterly newsletters that will help organizations create and maintain a culture of continuous improvement;
- Coaching in creating and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement in work settings or organizations;
- A practitioner certification process through which individuals earn certification by successfully implementing a culture of continuous improvement and attaining a high level of performance in their work processes;
- A coaching certification process through which an individual is certified to coach and certify others in implementing a culture of continuous improvement;
- An assortment of continuous improvement e-services including online coaching, threaded discussions, coaching materials, newsletters, and knowledge sharing.

Individuals and organizations can use the work of the Learning Cooperative to improve their knowledge and practice. Membership is free. Contact the Learning Cooperative at robertmcmahon@earthlink.net.

SUMMARY

This chapter covered initial steps that will help you identify your affiliate's role in closing achievement gaps. These steps form a foundation for activities in subsequent chapters.

We recommended that you engage in conversations within your affiliate, and between local and state affiliates, around: 1) mission statements that support your work in closing the gaps; 2) the needs and expectations of your primary stakeholders related to the gaps; and, most importantly, 3) how those needs and expectations translate into what they want the state or local association to do as you advance an initiative to close the gaps. You will be using this information in chapter 3 to develop specific association goals related to the gaps.

We also suggested that you take the time to identify stakeholders with an interest in closing achievement gaps. We will ask you to use this list in the following chapters as you move beyond preparation into activities related to the three components of NEA's Framework for Closing Achievement Gaps: Voice, Advocacy, and Affiliate Engagement and Support.

Finally, we encouraged you to consider how you will assess your progress in meeting goals related to closing the achievement gaps. All of these steps are part of the strategic planning process for your affiliate. The following chapters will help you think about the components of your plan more fully.

SUSTAINING THE EFFORT

- Develop a strategic plan for your affiliate that incorporates your role in closing achievement gaps.

- Develop an ongoing system of internal communication and data collection to inform the work of your affiliate.

- Develop an ongoing system of communication and outreach for parents and the community by building on those created to initiate the external conversations needed to prepare for closing achievement gaps.

- Identify a cadre of community leaders to build solid ties with parent groups and community and religious organizations around closing achievement gaps and to share in reaching out to the constituencies they represent.

GETTING THE JOB DONE: VOICE

Voice, the first component of the NEA framework for closing achievement gaps, centers on affiliates' messages about the gaps. Your message—your voice on this issue—is a critical component to getting the job done; i.e., to closing the gaps.

Your message is:

- Your **association's position** on closing achievement gaps;
- A **framework** for talking about your association's position;
- An **invitation** to become involved in this important work;
- A **calling card** that you can bring to your advocacy activities around closing the gaps;
- A **consistent** way for you to talk about this issue;
- A mantle under which you can **report progress** in closing the gaps;
- A **communication** vehicle to motivate members and others.

This chapter will help you develop and share a message that is credible, defensible, powerful, and persuasive. It asks you to:

1. **Examine the data.** Become knowledgeable and informed about the gaps so you can ground your message in the facts. The data we discuss will enable you to answer two key questions: *Which students are experiencing achievement gaps? What is contributing to, or causing, the gaps?*

2. **Take stock of your organizational context.** Make sure your message on closing the gaps is informed by what you stand for as an association. We recommend examining your mission, goals, current policy, what you have said about the gaps and related issues (e.g., student achievement, reading, or math performance), as well as some of the information you gathered or developed in chapters 1 and 2 (e.g., members' expectations and needs, activities of other stakeholders). This step will enable you to answer the question: *How does what we stand for as an association fit into closing the gaps?*

3. **Develop your message**. Draw on the data about who is experiencing gaps, the reasons for the gaps, and your association context to answer the question: *What is our organizational position on closing achievement gaps?*

4. **Determine how you will deliver your message.** Identify strategies for delivering the message so that you can answer the question: *How will we deliver our message to members and other stakeholders?*

There are many kinds of achievement gaps. Poor and minority students as well as students who receive special education services and those who are English-language learners often experience achievement gaps. And, depending on grade level (e.g., high school) and subject area (e.g., math, science), students of different genders also experience achievement gaps.

Data in three broad categories provide a detailed picture of which students are experiencing achievement gaps:

1. Performance on national and state tests, teacher-developed assessments, and related measures, such as tardiness and absences.

2. Access to key courses (e.g., algebra) and educational opportunities (e.g., Advanced Placement courses, calculus, higher education).

3. Attainments including matriculation to the next grade, high school graduation, employment after high school, and college degrees.

The Achievement Gaps Matrix on page 24 arrays these three kinds of data. Use the questions on page 27 to assist you in completing the matrix.

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS MATRIX

This is a tool for identifying the gaps that exist in your schools and/or districts, and it can be used to begin the planning process for addressing those gaps. Insert the most recent performance, access, and attainment data for each group represented in your schools and/or districts.

	Performance (Test Score)	Access	Attainment
	NAEP, SAT, ACT, other tests	AP Classes, College prep, Advanced Math, other advanced programs	HS graduate, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, technical training
Race/Ethnicity American Indian/ Alaska Native Asian/Pacific Islander* Black Hispanic* White			
Language Background Limited English Proficiency			
Disability Status Special Education			
Gender Male Female			
Income Nonpoverty Poverty			

* We understand that these groups are not homogeneous and where data are available, they will be disaggregated (e.g. Hmong, Korean, Japanese, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican-American).

PERFORMANCE DATA

Performance on standardized tests, measures of classroom performance, and related measures, such as tardiness and absences

Often standardized tests are the primary means of identifying students who are experiencing achievement gaps. Well-known tests, including the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), high school exit exams, end-of-course exams, and performance on statewide achievement tests are key sources of information.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), if the number of students in a specific group is sufficiently large (and that threshold varies from state to state), results on statewide achievement tests are reported by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, migrant status, English proficiency, and students' status as economically disadvantaged.

Test scores that are reported for various student groups enable teachers and other educators to see how groups of students are performing. In the past, many schools reported average achievement for all students, and this generally masked the performance of groups of students who were experiencing achievement gaps.

For example, a school may have reported that, overall, 58 percent of students were "proficient" on the state reading test. However, this average could include 83 percent of white students but only 33 percent of economically disadvantaged students. Now, it is possible to get a picture of which groups of students are experiencing achievement gaps, as is illustrated in "What Reporting Data by Student Groups Reveals" (see below).

Classroom-based information regarding students' performance helps identify specific knowledge and skills gaps—a critical step in deciding on appropriate interventions to close achievement gaps. Teachers routinely collect information about students' knowledge and skills through running records, conference logs, chapter tests, quizzes, reading and writing journals, portfolios and other examples of student work, student grades, and observations of students in the classroom.

Schools collect other data related to performance and routinely maintain statistics about factors that can contribute to achievement gaps. These include student mobility, daily attendance, tardiness, and expulsions. Some students who perform poorly on tests have high absence rates. Some may even leave school for an extended period of time during the year. In other cases, students move from school to school in the district as their families seek affordable housing. Still others are homeless, which can have a profound effect on attendance and on learning.

WHAT REPORTING DATA BY STUDENT GROUPS REVEALS

In a suburban northeast middle school with above-average test scores, 79 percent of the eighth graders scored in the "proficient" or "advanced" categories on the state language arts and literacy assessment. Here are the results for various student groups.

Percentage "Proficient" or "Advanced"
on State 8th Grade Language Test
2003–04

Group	Percent Proficient + Advanced
White	85%
Black	67%
Hispanic	69%
Asian & Pacific Islander	84%
Female	88%
Male	71%
Students with disabilities	32%
Economically disadvantaged	60%
Limited English proficiency	20%

Source: http://education.state.nj.us/rc/rc04
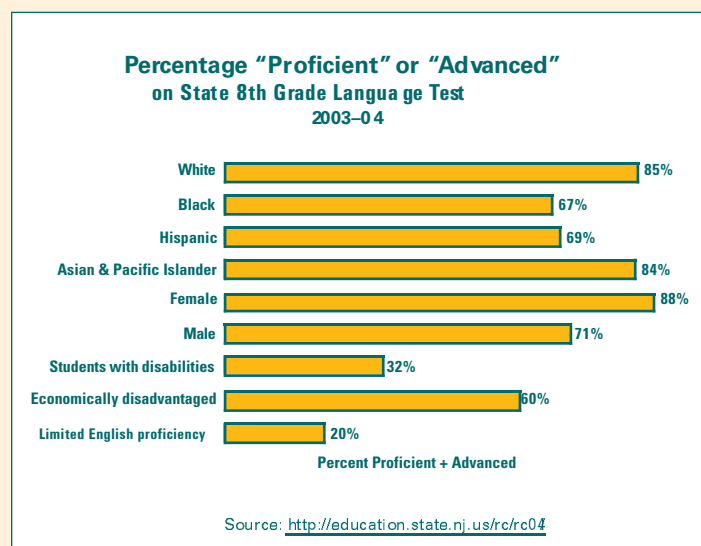
DATA RELATED TO ACCESS

Access to key courses and educational opportunities

Achievement gaps often are reflected in students' differential access to, and enrollment in, courses and programs that are associated with academic success. For example, poor and minority students often are underrepresented among students who take algebra, calculus, physics, and other "college prep" courses. Minority students often have less access to, and are underrepresented in, gifted and talented programs, but, as the sidebar illustrates, they often are overrepresented in special education and among students who are suspended from school.

Similarly, minority students are underrepresented among students who take Advanced Placement courses. And students who are experiencing gaps often do not have access to other advanced educational opportunities such as International Baccalaureate programs or programs that provide college credit for advanced courses taken in high school.

Students also may not have access to programs that can help close achievement gaps. These include one-on-one tutoring, extended learning time after school and in the summer, and programs that pair students with adult mentors and role models.

NATIONAL DATA ON STUDENT ACCESS

What does the data look like in your local or state?

Minority Students are Underrepresented in Gifted & Talented Programs, Overrepresented in Special Ed & Suspensions
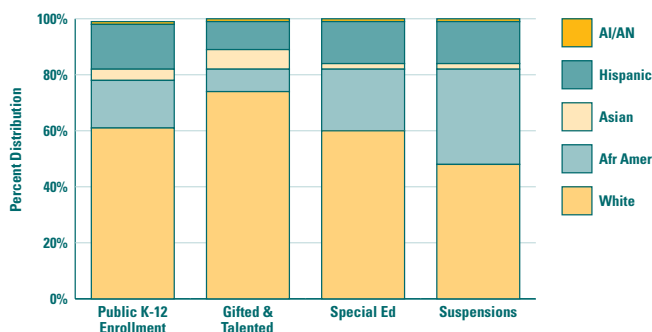
Source: Education Trust, EdWatch Online 2004 State Summary Reports, www.edtrust.org.

Minority Students are Underrepresented Among AP Test Takers
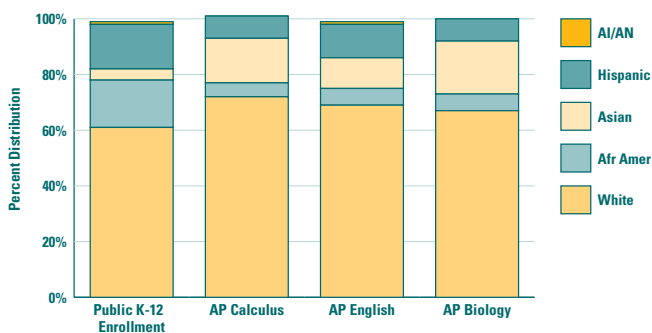
Source: Education Trust, EdWatch Online 2004 State Summary Reports, www.edtrust.org.

DATA ON STUDENT ATTAINMENT

Honors, degrees, certifications, and workforce success

Students' attainments include high school diplomas and GEDs, college degrees, academic honors, and employment histories after high school and college. The sidebar "National Data on Student Attainment" (this page) illustrates differences in educational attainment—high school completion, some college, and bachelor's degree—for students in four groups (white, Asian-American, Hispanic, and African-American). For example, for every 100 white students in the educational pipeline, 33 will earn a bachelor's degree by age 25, but for every 100 Hispanic students, only 8 will earn an undergraduate degree.

Questions To Ask

To identify which students in your school, school district, community, or state are experiencing achievement gaps, ask the following questions as you review available data on performance, access, and attainment:

1. Which students are experiencing achievement gaps?
2. What are the specific gaps students are experiencing: gaps in performance on tests, gaps in access to key opportunities, attainment gaps?
3. What information points to the specific gaps?
4. If there are gaps in students' performance on statewide achievement tests or other standardized tests, what does the test evidence look like? How does performance look grade by grade, in various subjects and skill areas?

5. What do classroom data suggest about the performance of students experiencing achievement gaps?
6. What do data related to students' performance (e.g., attendance rates, mobility) indicate about who is experiencing achievement gaps?

Your answers to these questions should provide a profile of which students are experiencing achievement gaps. You can also use the "Achievement Gaps Matrix" Tool on page 24 to help identify these gaps, and you will be able to substantiate your identification with data about students' performance, attainment, and/or access.

NATIONAL DATA ON STUDENT ATTAINMENT

Educational Attainment Gaps: Summary

	Complete HS by 19	Complete at Least Some College by 22	Earn a Bachelor's Degree by 25
100 White Students	84	63	33
100 Asian-American Students	88	75	54
100 Hispanic Students	61	32	8
100 African–American Students	68	44	16

Source: NEA Research 2005

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE GAPS

Factors that contribute to achievement gaps are multiple, complex, and often interrelated (e.g., poverty, low expectations for students, unsafe schools). Listed below are factors that have been identified as contributing to achievement gaps. We have grouped them into two categories: factors that local and/or state affiliates can influence, and those that are beyond the association's primary influence.

The association can influence factors that are:

- School-based
- Teacher- and teaching-related
- Student-related
- Related to families' support of students' learning (selected factors)

The association has less influence over factors that are related to:

- Opportunity and access in the local community
- Students' background
- Education funding shortfalls
- Families' support of students' learning (selected factors)
- Other societal factors

Examples of the factors in each category are listed in "Factors that Contribute to Achievement Gaps" (page 29). The association is able to influence factors listed in the left hand column in two ways: 1) directly through its actions and the actions of members or 2) indirectly by influencing those who set educational policy (e.g., local school board, state board of education, legislators who sit on education committees).

For example, NEA members often participate on local and state curriculum committees. Through their participation, affiliates have a direct opportunity to influence curriculum rigor. Similarly, most members would agree that they have a direct influence on students' interest in school and level of effort. In contrast, members and affiliates can only affect other factors by working with and through others. These include the quality of teacher preparation, state certification requirements, and families' participation in school activities.

Other factors that contribute to achievement gaps are the province of policymakers (e.g., state legislators and school board members), although state and local affiliates work to influence them. These factors include class size and the adequacy of materials and resources. While it may be difficult to address these issues, in some cases, they may be key to closing achievement gaps.

In contrast, local and state affiliates have little or no influence over a range of community and societal factors associated with achievement gaps, including a community's economic base, safety, social, and health services. The association also cannot control racial or ethnic bias that is manifested outside school. Nor do we have any way to change students' background—birth weight, mobility, or primary language. And, although we work diligently to secure adequate education funding, we often are at the mercy of budget shortfalls, unfunded federal mandates, and funding inequities.

Questions To Ask

To identify factors that are contributing to student achievement gaps, ask:

1. Which of the factors listed in the sidebar "Factors that Contribute to Achievement Gaps" contribute to the achievement gaps that you have identified?
2. Are there other factors that contribute to the gaps?
3. If there are, how do they contribute – and to which gaps do they contribute?
4. Which, if any, of the factors can you influence, either directly or by working with and through others?

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

A variety of factors may contribute to the achievement gaps in your schools. As you develop your plan for addressing the gaps, consider which factors your affiliate can have the greatest impact on in order to improve teaching and learning conditions. Think strategically about how the Association can focus its efforts on the various factors that contribute to achievement gaps. How do these factors influence the Association's message on closing achievement gaps? What can the Association do through its professional development, bargaining, or political activities to address these factors? How can the Association build meaningful partnerships for closing the gaps in order to address these factors?

THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY HAS PRIMARY INFLUENCE AND CONTROL OVER:

School-based

■ Low expectations for student achievement;

■ Lack of rigor in the curriculum;

■ Large class size;

■ Tracking groups of students into a less demanding curriculum;

■ Unsafe schools;

■ Culturally unfriendly environments;

■ Poor, or no, instructional leadership.

Teacher- and Teaching-Related

■ Uncertified and inexperienced teachers;

■ Insensitivity to different cultures;

■ Poor teacher preparation;

■ Low expectations of students;

■ Inadequate materials, equipment, resources, including technology-based resources.

Student-Related

■ Students' interest in school;

■ Students' level of effort;

■ Students' feeling that they are, in part, responsible for their learning.

Families' Support of Students' Learning

■ Families' participation in school activities;

■ Families' skills to support and reinforce learning;

■ Students' TV watching and at-home reading.

THE EXTERNAL COMMUNITY HAS PRIMARY INFLUENCE AND CONTROL OVER:

Opportunity and Access in the Local Community

■ Economic opportunity for students' families;

■ Access to health and social services;

■ Community safety;

■ Access to libraries, museums, and other institutions that support students' development;

■ Access to child care and after-school programs and facilities.

Students' Background

■ Families' income level;

■ Students' birth weight;

■ Students' diet and nutrition at home;

■ Students' mobility;

■ Students' primary language (if other than English).

Education Funding Shortfalls

■ State budget deficits;

■ Unfunded federal mandates;

■ Inequities in funding among school districts.

Families' Support of Students' Learning

■ Time family members are able to devote to support and reinforce learning.

Other Societal Factors

■ Racial and ethnic bias;

■ Social class;

■ Poverty.

Adapted from National Education Association. Spring 2004. Excellence and Equity: Closing the Student Achievement Gap. A report prepared by NEA's Professional Standards and Practtices Committee. Washington, DC: Author.

5. Which factors can you not influence? Can you identify other individuals or organizations that can influence these factors?

6. Overall, what picture emerges based on the identification of students who are experiencing achievement gaps and the factors that contribute to those gaps?

7. Does the information that has been gathered and reviewed point to any logical or high priority issues to begin efforts to close the gaps?

Based on your answers to these questions, you should have a good sense of factors that are contributing to the specific student achievement gaps you identified earlier in the chapter. It is now time to turn to another key piece of information that you will need to consider as you develop your message around the gaps—your organizational context.

ORGANIZATIONAL POSITION ON THE GAPS

It is important to consider key information about your association as you develop your message. Since the message around closing the achievement gaps advances your association's position on this issue, it should be informed by what the association stands for, what members expect, what your association has done in the past related to the gaps or related issues, and so on. Your message about closing achievement gaps should build logically on these and other factors that make up your organizational context.

Questions To Ask

1. What are your association's concerns and interests around closing the achievement gaps?

2. How does the association's mission (see chapter 2) support a message around closing achievement gaps?

3. How does your association's current policy base relate to, and inform, message development?

4. How does what you have said (or done) about the achievement gaps and related issues (e.g., student achievement, reading or math performance) inform message development?

5. What are the needs and expectations of your members related to closing the achievement gaps and your association's role in closing them?

6. Which achievement gaps (and contributing factors) are most important to address in the opinion of your leaders, staff, and members?

7. Are there achievement gaps (and contributing factors) that are most amenable to intervention in light of your organizational context, your resources, and your capacity?

The answers to these questions will provide a rich profile of your association—its policies, programs, concerns, interests, priorities, and capacity related to closing the achievement gaps. Keep this profile at hand as you move to the next step—message development.

YOUR MESSAGE ON CLOSING THE GAPS

It is now time to take all the information you have looked at in this chapter and craft an easy-to-understand, powerful, and brief message that articulates your association's position on closing achievement gaps.

■ Your message advances your **organizational position.** This is why we asked you to examine your organization in some depth.

The message from the Maryland State Teachers Association (MSTA) below advances the affiliate's organizational position. The message lays out several avenues MSTA intends to pursue in the name of quality to close achievement gaps.

■ Your message must be **credible and defensible**. This is why we asked you to ground your message in a firm understanding of which groups of students are experiencing achievement gaps and the factors that are contributing to them.

"The Future Starts Here: Connecticut Pushes for Pre-K Education," on page 33 describes how the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) established the credibility of its message about the importance of pre-K education in closing achievement gaps and increasing student achievement. Its examination of the research evidence on the effects of pre-K education led to a CEA public opinion poll on pre-K education, and an Association-hosted program of national experts who presented the latest research on the benefits of pre-K education. CEA created DVDs of the presentations, which were broadcast live on the state legislative channel and disseminated to legislators, the media, school board superintendents, and key Association leaders.

■ Your message is a **framework** for talking about your association's position. It is not a script or a slogan. It is a set of three or four short, memorable phrases or concepts that will help you organize your thoughts—and statements—about closing the gaps. In the best of circumstances, a message is tested with sample audiences through polling or focus groups to find out whether it is relevant, believable, and understandable.

■ Your message is an **invitation** to join you in important work. The message should help others understand achievement gaps deeply enough to care and to do something about the gaps.

■ Your message can serve as the mantle under which you can **report progress** in closing the gaps.

ONE AFFILIATE'S VOICE

Hi, I'm Pat Foerster, president of the Maryland State Teachers Association.

We believe every child can learn at higher levels. That's why we are committed to eliminating the minority achievement gap—evidence that low expectations have hindered the progress of too many students.

Our children deserve quality. And quality costs.

Quality means higher parental and teacher expectations, smaller class sizes, and updated books and technology.

Quality means holding students accountable for their performance.

Quality means qualified teachers in every classroom.

Last year, nearly half of Maryland's public school teachers with less than five years experience left the profession and even more in schools with large minority populations.

Quality also means that jurisdictions commit to adequate funding.

Every Maryland child can and must achieve.

Students count on ALL of us for great public schools for every child.

For inquiries contact Debra Williams-Garner, 410/263-6600 ext. 144, dwgarner@mstanea.org.

Source: Henderson, Ron. May 2005. "Priority Schools to Closing Achievement Gaps." Presentation at Transitioning from Priority Schools to Closing Achievement Gaps: What We've Learned and Where We'll Go Next. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

NEA MESSAGE: NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

REG WEAVER, president
National Education Association

The federal government has started its annual labeling exercise under the so-called No Child Left Behind law. Parents are being told that their schools and their children have failed. But the administration isn't offering resources to make schools better. NEA is leading the fight for real school improvement:

- Smaller class sizes
- Better trained teachers
- And, yes, more funding

Visit NEA.org to find out more. NEA—Great Public Schools for Every Child!

- Your message is a **consistent** way for advocates to talk about the issue—among different spokespersons and over time. Consistency is essential because your message is competing for space in the minds of people who are frequently thinking about other things.

  NEA's message on the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), captured in President Weaver's statement on this page, is an example of a simple, powerful, and understandable message that we have advanced consistently through statements by NEA officers, online, and in print. The message advances our position that we are working for real school improvement by advocating for smaller class sizes, better trained teachers, and more funding for schools.

- Your message provides a way to **showcase** the interest, dedication, and passion the association and its members have for closing achievement gaps.

- Your message is a **calling card** that you can bring to your advocacy activities related to closing the gaps, especially work you do in cooperation and collaboration with other stakeholders who have a role in closing the gaps.

- Your message is a vehicle to **communicate** with and motivate members.

Questions To Ask

1. Does the message communicate your organizational position on closing achievement gaps clearly and succinctly?

2. Will the message communicate that position with members, with partners and other stakeholders with whom you work, and with the media?

3. Is the message credible and defensible?

4. Is the message grounded sufficiently in what you know about who is experiencing achievement gaps? Is the message grounded sufficiently in the factors associated with the gaps?

5. Is the message an invitation for your members and others to join you in working to close achievement gaps?

6. Does the message showcase your interest, dedication, and passion around closing the gaps?

7. Does the message connect to specific goals, activities, initiatives on which you can report progress over time?

If you answered "yes" to these questions, you have developed a credible, defensible, powerful, and persuasive message.

Your message around closing achievement gaps communicates your association's position on this issue. As we discussed above, it must be powerful, succinct, credible, and motivational. Your message also is an invitation to action—a mechanism to help key stakeholders understand this issue and care enough to do something about the gaps.

THE FUTURE STARTS HERE: CONNECTICUT PUSHES FOR PRE-K EDUCATION

"We believe that the critical need to close the achievement gap among Connecticut's children cannot be accomplished without a parallel and sustained commitment to close the preparation gap."

— from *Pre-K Education: Because the Future Starts Here*, a joint statement of principles published by the Connecticut Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers-Connecticut, and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

CHALLENGE

As a state best known for superlatives, there is one distinction Connecticut would rather lose. Despite having the highest per capita income in the nation, Connecticut has one of the biggest gaps in student achievement.

To educators, the reasons why come as no surprise. In Connecticut, approximately 80,000 children are deemed "officially poor." The cities of Bridgeport and Hartford alone are home to some of the deepest poverty in the nation. Moreover, there are more than 18,000 school children in priority urban and rural schools across the state. With the advent of the so-called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, Connecticut educators, legislators, and voters agreed that "good for some" was not good enough.

"When we looked closely at the implications of NCLB," says Bob Murphy, director of Policy and Professional Practice at the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), "we knew we were going to be confronted with large numbers of schools deemed failing." Recognizing that multiple factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status contribute to gaps in achievement, CEA also knew that one of the best ways to attack the problem was at the root: preschool education.

ENVIRONMENT

According to the Connecticut Department of Education, 20 percent of Connecticut's three- and four-year olds do not have access to pre-K education. Nearly 14,000 of those children without access are in Connecticut's lowest-income communities.

Prior to NCLB, there already had been a burgeoning interest among state policymakers to increase the availability of preschool education. But with NCLB mandates in place, attention to the achievement gaps

and the connection to school readiness became even more critical.

"We'd had an early readiness program since 1997 that was funded at 47 million dollars," says Murphy. "But it was easier to subcontract out that work than deal with the complexities of having to work through human services issues, different agencies, and turf wars."

ACTIONS

The city of Bridgeport conducted a study that showed that Bridgeport children who were enrolled in a school readiness program in the city's public schools outperformed children who did not participate in pre-K programs when they were three or four years old. The study, conducted by Deborah P. Watson, director of early childhood for Bridgeport public schools, tracked the academic progress of 132 children enrolled in the school readiness program between 1997 and 1999, comparing their progress to a control group of 161 students who had not participated in a pre-K program during that same time. The findings showed that students in school readiness programs had:

- Fewer "needs to improve" and "unsatisfactory" marks;
- Fewer absences;
- Higher scores when assessing a child's readiness to read;
- Significantly fewer retentions in both kindergarten and first grade. For example, only 9.5 percent of the school readiness students were retained in first grade compared to 76.1 percent of control group students.

When dollars were applied to Watson's retention data, the cost factor was even more alarming.

"We documented in our study that it is about 10 times more costly to educate children in K–3 if they have not participated in a quality pre-K experience," reported Watson.

Watson's local research supported the extensive body of national research that high quality early care and education result in less problem behavior and higher cognitive development later in life. Such conclusions have helped convince local and state leaders that spending money on quality pre-K programs is a worthwhile investment.

ASSOCIATION INVOLVEMENT

CEA represents over 36,500 educators statewide. The Association has sparked momentum around the issue of universal access to pre-K programs with a qualified teacher in every classroom through careful research, the garnering of public opinion, and legislative advocacy.

"We set about, in a reasonable way, developing credibility and, being at the table, trying to mute the idea that we were trying to do a takeover of the pre-K environment," says Murphy. "Our interest is in providing access to preschool, particularly in the inner city. We need to raise the bar in terms of quality of teaching."

Information gathering was a first step. John Yrchik, executive director of CEA, serves on Connecticut's governor-appointed Commission for Children. When the Commission wanted to take a look at the research regarding pre-kindergarten, CEA formed an internal working group consisting of CEA President Rosemary Coyle, Bob Murphy, members of the government relations staff, the head of the UniServ department, as well as other CEA members. The group conducted four 10-person focus groups that included two educators each from urban and suburban schools plus a mix of parents and grandparents.

In December 2004, CEA conducted a public opinion poll of 400 individuals on the matter of pre-K education—the first of its kind in the state. On February 7, 2005, CEA released the results of the survey, announcing that Connecticut voters overwhelmingly supported expanding pre-K programs that were tied to public school standards and that required certified teachers. Sixty-six percent favored using state money to build extra classrooms.

The poll also found that nearly two-thirds of respondents supported a 1 percent income tax increase for families making more than $500,000 a year and a similar increase on businesses to support preschool programs. CEA estimates that would raise about $300 million annually—a significant increase from the $46 million a year now being used to educate 7,500 preschoolers in 16 priority school districts.

The following week, CEA hosted a two-hour public program of national experts who presented the latest research

on the benefits of pre-K education. The event—cosponsored by state Senator Thomas Gaffey, co-chair of the state legislature's Education Committee and Rep. Denise W. Merrill, co-chair of the Appropriations Committee—was held at the legislative office building in Hartford.

"Once we had that information in hand," says Murphy, "with the support of NEA, we brought in Jack Shonkoff from Brandeis University, the chair of the National Research Council/National Academy of Sciences on the Emerging Child, and Marcy Whitebook, from UCLA, whose expertise is in early care and early workforce issues." Shonkoff is coeditor of *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development,* considered 'the bible of brain development.' Whitebrook was the founding executive director of the Washington, DC-based Center for the Child Care Workforce, best known for its landmark national child care staffing study that first brought public attention to the low wages of child-care workers.

The research demonstrated that children do better after attending pre-K programs taught by college-educated teachers with training in early childhood and that public pre-K programs would benefit children from all income brackets, noting that almost half of Connecticut's five-year-olds who do not know their alphabet are from middle- and upper-middle-class families.

CEA created DVDs of the presentations, which were broadcast live on the state legislative channel, and disseminated them to legislators, the media, school board superintendents, and key Association leaders.

To further engage the public, CEA published and disseminated *Pre-K Education: Success Stories,* which demonstrates the benefits that a quality pre-K experience provides to children, parents, and state coffers as well. CEA continues to aggressively advocate for universal, voluntary public education through its member publications and resources for the public. Despite considerable progress, however, a number of hurdles still remain.

"We have to convince superintendents to take on the issue of pre-K education," says Murphy. But the case for increasing the quality of the workforce is so compelling that private providers are in a bind as well, he says. "Even they realize they can no longer pay slave wages or have an unqualified workforce."

BIGGEST SUCCESSES SO FAR

In February 2005, the Connecticut Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers-Connecticut, and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents joined forces to develop and publish a statement of principles *Pre-K Education: Because the Future Starts Here.* The position paper summarizes key research and states, "We believe that the critical need to close the achievement gap among Connecticut's children cannot be accomplished without a parallel and sustained commitment to close the preparation gap."

When Lt. Governor M. Jodi Rell took over the governorship in July 2004, following the indictment of Connecticut Governor John G. Rowland, she stated her support for early childhood education in her opening address. Soon after, Rell appointed Dr. Janice Gruendel, a leading advocate for children, to recommend steps to expand and strengthen early childhood education and to seek new strategies to close the achievement gaps in Connecticut. The new governor also formed a working group to cost out what it might look like to provide universal pre-K care on a sliding scale.

Two bills are now being consolidated in the legislature, says Murphy. Both versions have a timeline requiring all pre-K teachers to have a bachelor's degree, advanced training, and certification by 2012. The governor is committed to increasing the number of slots for preschool by 1,000; while there will be some increase in available slots for pre-K, it is unclear at this time if this goal will be met. There will be conditions related to any preschool that accepts public dollars in terms of curriculum standards for pre-K, and schools would have to agree to adopt the curriculum framework and training as well.

"Besides ensuring that teachers are qualified, it is our challenge to increase the number of public pre-K centers," says Murphy. "That's something we'll continue to work on."

Contact:

Bob Murphy, director of Policy and Professional Practice, Connecticut Education Association: bobm@cea.org, (800) 842-4316; www.cea.org.

MEMBERS AND YOUR MESSAGE

Minimally, members need to understand the message. It needs to "ring true" to them based on their understanding of achievement gaps and your association's history on this and related issues (e.g., educational quality, equality, student achievement).

But it is likely that you will want members to do more with your message. Do you want them to endorse it, advance it, begin working on closing the gaps, or double their effort on activities they have already started?

If members do not recognize achievement gaps as a problem, if they do not feel any personal involvement in the issue, or if they feel they cannot do anything to close the gaps, they are unlikely to do anything with your message.

Take the time to get a sense of where your members now reside on this issue:

- Do they recognize that achievement gaps exist?
- What is their personal interest in working to close the gaps?
- Do they feel that they can, indeed, help narrow the gaps?

The answers to these three questions will provide you with information for how you communicate your message to members.

To deliver your message effectively:

1. **Address members' understanding of this issue.** Some members may not recognize that achievement gaps exist. Others may not see this as an issue in which they need to be involved because "there are no achievement gaps at my school." Still others understand that gaps exist, but do not see how their individual or collective actions can help narrow the gaps. The problem is simply too big, they maintain, and schools alone cannot close achievement gaps.

    As you advance your message: a) let members know that achievement gaps exist;

b) that they are present in every school in some form and to some extent; and c) that schools can, in fact, address the gaps successfully through their own efforts and in partnership with others in their communities.

If you do not address members' understandings of achievement gaps, subsequent communications with them are unlikely to be effective. They may simply ignore an issue in which they do not feel any need to get involved.

2. **Approach activist members early and listen to them carefully.** If a group of members has been working to close achievement gaps in their school and district, you are well advised to listen to them before you begin communicating with them. These members may have already come up with solutions and taken action. They may have decided that they do not need your help or they may reject your message if it does not conform to what they are already doing. You want to see how you can support these members' efforts. In your communications with them, acknowledge their efforts and offer your support.

3. **Gain members' support before going public with your message.** Once you have your members behind you on your gaps message, you can then go public. Parents, media, interest groups, community groups will expect your members to be on board. Tread lightly with other stakeholders until you have your members' support.

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS AND YOUR MESSAGE

One of the most effective strategies for delivering your message to other stakeholders is to stage your delivery. In fact, as we explain below, *the least effective approach is to deliver your message to all the stakeholders at the same time*. Stakeholders play different roles in supporting and advancing your message around closing the gaps.

1. **Communicate, first, with your external partners and key powerbrokers.** Partners are individuals and groups whom your members consider partners (e.g., school principals, community groups, families). They will likely support your message. Of equal importance are powerbrokers whom you want to support your message, your members, and your partners (e.g., superintendents, school boards, state legislatures). Your members and external partners undoubtedly will be interested in what you are saying to key powerbrokers. It is best to deliver your message to both audiences—external partners and key powerbrokers—early in your communication plan.

2. **Next, get your partners and key powerbrokers to agree with your message.** These individuals and groups need to support and endorse your message about closing the achievement gaps. If they do not, how will you advance the message effectively? Your partners and key powerbrokers should view closing the gaps as important, and it would be best if they felt personally involved in addressing the gaps. If they do not, they should, at least, support your association's and members' work in this area. They should voice confidence that your efforts can make a difference and will, indeed, help close the gaps.

3. **Share your message with your friends.** These are individuals and organizations that wish you well and hope that your efforts to close the achievement gaps are successful. They include other unions, other education organizations, state legislators and state board of education members who care about public education, NEA, and other NEA affiliates. Your friends are potential partners, but they will want to see that the partners you have already identified and key powerbrokers support your message and organizational efforts.

4. **Spread the message broadly.** The final group that you need to deliver your message to is what might be called the "silent majority," a borrowed phrase that captures the stakeholders we have in mind. As the label suggests, these are individuals and groups who have little or no apparent investment in closing the achievement gaps. The silent majority will vary from place to place. It might, for example, include parents of high-performing students or community groups that focus on issues other than students.

   The silent majority also includes the media. It is important to communicate with the silent majority last. Although they have no personal involvement in closing the achievement gaps, they can quickly become a strong voice that opposes what you are doing. For example, if you are working to close the gaps through an open enrollment policy that allows students experiencing achievement gaps to enroll in high-performing schools, parents in these schools might coalesce quickly to oppose the policy. Make sure your members, partners, and key powerbrokers support your message before communicating with the silent majority. And, remember, this includes the media.

5. **Keep advancing your message.** Maintain high visibility on this issue by implementing a communication plan that enables you to regularly: a) report progress on your members' efforts to close achievement gaps; b) share insights about what else is needed to close the gaps; and c) showcase members' passion about the importance of this work. We suggest a number of ways to maintain this visibility with members, families, the public, and the media in "High-Visibility Activities To Project an Association Voice" (page 38).

HIGH-VISIBILITY ACTIVITIES TO PROJECT AN ASSOCIATION VOICE

How could you use these activities to build support for your message on closing achievement gaps? What other activities might help you project your association voice?

WITH MEMBERS

1. Build a teacher support program in which members with expertise in strategies that close achievement gaps support their colleagues.

2. Develop a central resource or broker a connection to online and print resources on achievement gaps that community members can easily access.

3. Make sure every member understands which groups of students are experiencing gaps and the factors (within and outside of education) contributing to the gaps.

4. Make sessions on closing achievement gaps regular items at meetings of UniServ and local association representatives.

5. Encourage members to talk to friends and neighbors at every opportunity about what educators and the association and its members are doing to close achievement gaps.

6. Organize and sponsor member/staff seminars on association plans for closing the gaps.

7. Provide members with information they can use at parent conferences to increase parents' understanding of how important it is to close achievement gaps, even if the parent's child is not experiencing gaps.

WITH FAMILILES AND THE PUBLIC

1. Organize forums on closing achievement gaps for parents and community members.

2. Engage the public in a discussion of what can be done communitywide to close gaps.

3. Produce a brochure about achievement gaps to increase awareness of the problem among parents and the public.

4. Create parent tip sheets that explain what parents can do to address gaps in achievement.

5. Start an electronic newsletter on closing achievement gaps.

6. Collect or produce tips for families on understanding student report cards and results from statewide or other achievement tests so they can monitor their children's performance more effectively.

7. Interpret and publicize results from statewide assessment programs—a chief indicator of achievement gaps.

8. Develop consensus in the community on student testing and publicize it widely.

WITH THE MEDIA

1. Sponsor a forum or teach-in on closing achievement gaps and invite the media.

2. Create, or revive, a local association speakers' bureau that is prepared to give interviews, handle questions from the press, make presentations, and provide information to the public and the media on closing achievement gaps.

3. Begin a public information campaign organized around member-written letters and op-ed essays in local newspapers to showcase what the association and its partners are doing to close the gaps.

4. Organize a press conference to spotlight what the association and its partners in the community are doing to close achievement gaps.

5. Make use of local cable access TV channels and programs to present your vision for closing the gaps and to showcase accomplishments.

6. Schedule a meeting with the education reporter and editor of the local newspaper to educate them about the complex factors that contribute to achievement gaps in order to help them do a better job reporting.

SUMMARY

This chapter recommended that NEA affiliates develop and deliver your message around closing achievement gaps by:

1. Examining data related to students' performance, access, and attainment so your message is data-driven and based on a solid understanding of which students are experiencing achievement gaps and the factors that contribute to, or cause, the gaps.

2. Making sure your message on closing the gaps is informed by what you stand for as an association.

3. Using the information from #1 and #2 to develop a credible, defensible, powerful, and persuasive message on your association's position on closing the achievement gaps.

4. Delivering your message using a staged approach that ensures support by members, external partners, and key powerbrokers before broader dissemination to the media and others.

Now that you have developed this important vehicle, keep using and advancing it.

SUSTAINING THE EFFORT

Your association's message around closing achievement gaps is a tool you can use to sustain your efforts to close the gaps.

■ It is an invitation to become involved in this important work, and your message can motivate your members and others to get involved.

■ It can serve as a mantle under which you can issue periodic progress reports on how your members are closing the gaps.

■ It is your association's calling card on this issue and can help you enlist partners and seek funding to support your continuing efforts.

GETTING THE JOB DONE: ADVOCACY

Advocacy, the second component in NEA's Framework for Closing Achievement Gaps, covers territory that is likely to be familiar to Association readers. This component considers how affiliates can use traditional Association advocacy vehicles to make a difference in closing the achievement gaps.

In this chapter, we will focus on:

■ Political activities at both the federal and state levels in support of candidates and legislation to close the achievement gaps;

■ Developing bargaining agreements that support the inclusion of working conditions that improve student outcomes;

■ Partnerships with other national organizations and policymakers;

■ Securing federal, state, and private funding in collaboration with partners to leverage your achievement gaps work, as well as developing linkages to work supported by grants to our affiliates and members.

Each of these topics is grounded in the well-established strength of NEA and its affiliates. Over the past 40 years, the Association's efforts—in the context of political action, contract negotiations, community outreach programs, public policy, and numerous other venues—have helped shape public education.

POLITICAL ADVOCACY FOR CLOSING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Political advocacy comes in different forms. An affiliate may choose to tackle an issue by advocating for a change in policy at the district or state level. Advocacy can be directed at the local superintendent and school board with the aim of pushing for very specific changes that will improve the likelihood that achievement gaps will be closed.

For example, if the number of minority students going on to college is small, affiliates might lobby for college scholarships to fund first-generation minority students who achieve a certain GPA. Members can also push for the district to gather and report data on enrollment in Advanced Placement and high level math and science courses. They can work with community and faith-based groups to ensure that all students get adequate access to scholarship and other financial aid information. They can also work to have the district open students' access to algebra so all eighth graders take the course with sufficient support to pass it. As a way to sustain the effort, a coalition can demand that data continue to be gathered to see the effect of their efforts.

Affiliates can focus on state departments of education and state boards of education to effect changes that reach across their state. In constructing these policy level changes, affiliates will need broad-based partnerships or coalitions to effect real change and may need to reach out to groups previously untapped. The professional associations serving school board members, school administrators, state administrators of federal programs, higher education boards, local PTA affiliates, civil rights organizations, and others may be called upon to contribute to advocacy efforts to modify policies that either put certain children at a disadvantage for learning or could create greater opportunities for them.

Another avenue for affiliate political advocacy is through election campaigns affecting important educational issues. In those states using popular referenda, tactics such as coalition building, communications, relationship tending, and cost sharing are critical to success in getting the results needed to close achievement gaps. Similar challenges arise in electing individuals, whether they are local school board members, state or local superintendents, higher education commissioners, state and federal legislators, or other elected officials whose roles affect the quality of public education. Affiliates play key roles in informing voters, getting them to the polls, and challenging candidates

to be clear and consistent in their views. Of course, once the right people get elected, affiliates may have to "keep their feet to the fire" and advocate for changes in legislation at the federal or state levels to ensure that sufficient funding and accountability flow down to the local level to support effective policies and practices that can help close achievement gaps and keep them closed.

Crafting legislation is always challenging. One question that always comes up during legislative hearings is "Has any other state passed this type of legislation?" When the answer is "yes," and there are positive results of implementation, it increases the chances of passage. The best source for recent state legislative proposals is the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). NCSL has a database of legislative proposals including an education database ranging from accountability to vouchers. It does not distinguish good from bad, rather it is a resource. The NCSL database can be found at: http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/educ_leg.cfm. For sample NEA legislation on closing the gaps, see the sidebar on this page.

SAMPLE LEGISLATION FOR CLOSING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

NEA Government Relations and Student Achievement staff have worked together to craft model legislation addressing several issues related to closing achievement gaps. The issues are:

- Improving data systems and their use by teachers and other instructional personnel;
- Establishing small class size policies and improved working conditions for teachers;
- Establishing a program for the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers;
- Establishing a program to provide extended learning opportunities for students such as afterschool, weekend, and summer programs;
- Establishing a program to increase and enhance parent or guardian involvement in schools;
- Establishing preschool and full day kindergarten programs.

You can view the sample legislation in the Appendix on page 87. For more information on these sample bills, contact NEA Student Achievement (202) 822-7350 or the NEA Government Relations State Policy and Politics unit (202) 822-7300.

WHY DO NEW TEACHERS JOIN NEA?

An August 2005 survey report revealed that 89% of educators who joined NEA less than 4 years ago did so because they wanted to belong to an organization that is working to ensure a quality education system.

Eighty-one percent (81%) reported wanting to belong to a group that offers training and workshops that help them to do their work better.

A lesser percentage of newer educators, 78%, joined to obtain better pay and benefits.

Source: Star Research. August 2005.

LEGISLATION TO SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING

While approaches will vary from state to state, there are some policies and programs that can be useful in every state, based on what research tells us. Here are some legislative recommendations that research shows positively affect student learning and that are supported in NEA's legislative program.

RESEARCH SAYS:	NEA LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM SAYS:
States have a responsibility to provide funding to be sure all schools are clean, safe, well-maintained environments that promote learning for all students.[1]	NEA advocates for the provision of a school environment that properly protects students and employees from environmental health and/or safety hazards and supports federal assistance for school construction, maintenance, renovation, and repair. NEA supports federal initiatives to prevent and combat violence and drugs in schools.
To support and enhance learning, states should develop policies ensuring convenient and consistent access to instructional technology and communication technology in all classrooms. State education budgets should include funding to provide this access. [1]	NEA supports adequate funding for technological improvements, and the legislative program details a number of specific technology issues that should be addressed in policy and funding.
Based on current trends, every teacher will be faced with English-language learners (ELLs) at some point in their careers. To prepare for this, all states should require second language acquisition and English as a Second Language (ESL) methodology training for all pre-service teachers in all certification/content areas. Appropriate coursework in this methodology should be provided as part of teacher preparation, in-service education, and as part of alternative certification programs.[2]	NEA supports adequately funded and culturally sensitive programs for English-language learner (ELL) students that provide meaningful instruction in other curriculum areas through such programs as bilingual education and English language development, and result in functional proficiency in English. NEA advocates for the assurance of an adequate supply of trained bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals through programs to identify, counsel, tutor, and nurture bilingual students through their secondary schooling and postsecondary education.
States can look at alternative assessment measures and systems for awarding diplomas in order to move beyond a reliance on standardized tests. High-stakes tests are a particular challenge for special education students and ELL students. For example, the state of Washington is testing a portfolio system for demonstrating mastery and determining high school graduation instead of just relying on test scores.	NEA supports the ongoing evaluation of student achievement based on assessment measures that are directly linked to the lessons teachers teach and the materials teachers use. NEA also advocates amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to waive required annual testing and to design assessment programs that measure student achievement at least once in elementary, once in middle, and once in high school and the development of federal legislation for assessment plans that conform to NEA Resolutions.

1 *Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions.* The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, Chapel Hill, NC, 2005.

2 Short, Deborah and Jana Echevarria. 2004. "Teacher Skills to Support English Language Learners." *Educational Leadership* 62(4): 8-13.

SEATTLE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION: BARGAINING TO CLOSE THE GAPS

"Teachers really want to do this work. They have the knowledge and the skills, they just need to have the opportunity to come together and do it collaboratively. Doing it individually is not going to work."

— Wendy Kimball, president, Seattle Education Association

CHALLENGE

Nowhere, perhaps, are the day-to-day challenges of closing the achievement gaps more acutely felt than in urban centers undergoing rapid demographic changes. Seattle is such a city. Met with waves of new immigrants, a critical lack of teachers of color, and a chronic statewide budget crisis that threatens job security, Seattle educators realized they lacked key resources to best meet the needs of their students. As much as dollars and cents, they knew they needed cultural competence; ways to attract, train, and hold onto minority teachers; and parental and community support to accomplish the goal of creating a bright future for Seattle's students.

ENVIRONMENT

As a port city, Seattle is rich with diversity and the first stop for many new foreign-born residents. Demographics show that the city is made up of less than 30 percent people of color. Yet more than 70 languages can be heard in the city's classrooms, where students of color make up 58.8 percent of the entire student body.

"The teaching staff does not reflect this diversity," says Wendy Kimball, president of the Seattle Education Association (SEA), "and the percentage of staff of color is declining."

Seattle's challenges in recruiting and retaining minority educators is an all-too-familiar cycle of frustration. The newest, youngest teachers end up in the most challenging schools because senior teachers opt to move elsewhere.

"These 22–26 year-old new teachers from suburbia enter into culture shock," says Kimball. "We provided training, but at the same time we were loading them up with difficult schedules and few systems to support them outside of the first year. They were leaving because they felt overwhelmed."

So serious is this imbalance that the Association made the recruitment and retention of minority teachers a key component of its collective bargaining. The state of Washington, however, does not share that vision. Similar to the anti-affirmative action statutes endorsed in California's Proposition 209, Washington state does not allow for

affirmative action in public institutions. What does that mean in terms of the goal of increasing the number of minority educators in the state?

"For certain groups of people of color, particularly those of low socio-economic status, they don't have a means to get into higher education programs," says Kimball. "And for those who do, there are so many other professions that provide less stress and higher compensation."

Owing to a bleak economic forecast, Seattle stood to lose even the qualified nonminority teachers it already had on board. Washington state is 42nd in the nation in per student funding. Moreover, for years, Seattle teachers were being paid less than the other 12 surrounding districts. And despite a new bargaining contract that will work to correct this inequity, there is a structural deficit of about 20 to 25 million dollars that is being covered with financial bandaids, one-time money, and very tight budgets.

ACTIONS

Parent and community engagement, cultural competence, creating professional learning communities, and teacher compensation were key components of Seattle's multifaceted strategy to narrow the achievement gaps.

"About four or five years ago, the district engaged in a workshop called 'Courageous Conversations on Race' that provided me with a lens to look at issues around opportunity and race that I had not encountered before," says Kimball.

Following the workshop, Association leaders appealed to the school district for all school employees to benefit from such training. As a result, a day at the beginning of each school year now is set aside to allow staff in their individual buildings to receive training and other resources to move them further along the path of recognizing the diversity issues that exist in their school environments. In 2004, the Seattle School District was successful in redefining the city's Director of Equity and Race Relations position and hired Caprice Hollins—a psychologist and college instructor with experience in diversity counseling—to help eradicate racial inequities in its schools.

"Her role was to help us make sure we were framing this in a way that is meaningful and sensitive to the range of children we service," says Kimball. "She also works with community groups, business leaders, and professionals on how to engage with the public around what children need."

Another important strategy the district used to enhance student achievement was building an articulated school system of feeder patterns that would allow its 45,000 students to naturally transition from elementary to high school. This provides stability and continuity for students and education employees as well. Under this system, a student is placed in a "flight" that includes a predetermined path from elementary through high school. Students benefit from a curriculum that is aligned horizontally and vertically. If a student moves from school A to school B, that student is expected to master certain skills, and those values stay in place. At the same time, Seattle's rich offerings of alternative schools and parent choice will remain available to students.

Teachers who opt to work in a flight realize certain benefits as well, including job protections that are spelled out by contract. They are given stipends for doing the extra work it takes to align the curriculum so that teachers and students can know what each are going to expect at any grade level in any school in the flight and are paid extra days each year to connect with parents before school starts.

"If a teacher works in a flight and if the district is faced with a reduction in force (RIF), that teacher will be exempt from layoffs in the first year," Kimball explains. "In the second year, they would be RIFed no deeper than the district average. If there is a catastrophic RIF, the section would be null and void." While the "flight" plan is not implemented districtwide, a new flight of students and teachers transitions in each semester.

SEA agreed to work with the district to bring together three culturally based teams to work to integrate materials for the classroom. The teams look at how teachers are being trained to respond to diverse learning styles and how best to organize local neighborhoods to build support systems for the schools. They also help train educators in how to have conversations with minority parents in order to affect student learning.

"Teachers really want to do this work," says Kimball. "They have the knowledge and skills, they just need to have the opportunity to come together and do it collaboratively. Doing it individually is not going to work."

ASSOCIATION INVOLVEMENT

SEA represents approximately 5,000 employees. This number includes certificated regular and substitute non-supervisory staff; paraprofessional regular and substitutes; and clerical regular and substitutes.

"Our job here at the union is to remove whatever barriers come up so that people have a real opportunity to be successful," says Kimball.

Toward that end, the Association best positioned its members for that success by listening and then responding to what those members say they need most—professional development and the time and compensation they need and deserve to do the job. In May 2002, SEA's Representative Assembly took a stand to focus Association attention on closing the achievement gaps, including a commitment to increase the cultural literacy of the entire education community. In the fall of 2003, the membership and Representative Assembly endorsed a position clearly stating that, "bargaining priorities should reflect our belief statement on closing the achievement gap."

The Association designed and disseminated a series of bargaining climate surveys, the results of which demonstrated that teachers and education support associates overwhelmingly supported closing the achievement gaps as a bargaining priority. In surveys conducted in spring 2004, 82 percent of respondents said competitive compensation was important, and 72 percent of respondents said closing the achievement gaps was important. Teachers also made clear their need for professional development to enhance their skills in teaching in a diverse urban community.

"We knew from our surveys that closing the achievement gaps was critical work that needed to be done, but members recognized their deficits in certain skills areas, particularly in their ability to communicate with parents and community leaders about the work they needed to do with children. We decided we needed to work on contract language that would support opportunities to achieve this," says Kimball.

Another piece of the bargaining equation was that of teacher certification for paraprofessionals and instructional aides, of which 54 percent are people of color.

"We wanted to build a process to offer paraprofessionals opportunities to get teacher certification so they would then join the teaching ranks," says Kimball. "In order to do this, we had to come up with a hunk of money because they fall off the payroll when they're in student teaching. They lose benefits and salary when they are in school for one semester. Then, they would have to wait to be hired into a teaching position, which is difficult because of RIFs. It was a mess."

The Association wrote language that allowed them to take money from one pot—sabbaticals—and put two-thirds of that money into helping paraprofessionals become certified teachers. While there was tension-filled discussion around this strategy, language ultimately was drafted that allowed those who were interested to retain employment with the district while taking the necessary steps to certification.

BIGGEST SUCCESSES SO FAR

In September 2004, the Seattle school district signed an unprecedented five-year labor agreement with SEA. The contract includes specific language aimed at eliminating the gaps in achievement between students of different ethnic groups and a guarantee that the district will spend at least 5 million dollars annually starting in 2006–07 to make its pay scales more competitive with surrounding districts. Certificated staff will receive a 9 percent raise in supplemental pay over the first four years. Also included in the reform package was an increase in literacy and math coaches in designated schools, expanded teacher training in instructional strategies, a commitment to staff diversity, and resource support to help the weakest schools.

"The value of interest-based bargaining and making the child the center focus, based on member input, allowed us to successfully bring in a ratified contract prior to school opening," says Kimball. A contract for paraprofessionals that included increased compensation, professional development, and committee representation was passed in December 2004, but was made retroactive to September.

The contract also spells out a SEA/Seattle Public Schools partnership for closing the achievement gaps. Four committees—each consisting of appointees from SEA and the district—will tackle various aspects of the work. The Partnership Committee, for example, will identity internal and external resources to support school improvement and innovation; the Leadership Committee will address policy; the Labor-Management Committee will focus on general contract administration and interpreta-

tion; and Building Leadership Teams, reflecting the racial and ethnic composition of the school staff and community, will help oversee the schoolwide professional development and academic achievement plans for each school. Helping to carry out this work is a joint Culture and Race Committee that helped establish the contract language and continues to work on the details after the contract was negotiated.

"Focus groups are designing the plan to help make the program valid and build upon what we're learning to guarantee that the achievement gaps will be closed," says Kimball. "We have a staff member who heads the committee, which includes the head of the bilingual department for the district, and we have engaged teachers and paraprofessionals to participate. What evolves out of that committee will have to meet the litmus test of approval of the executive director of the local and the head of labor relations in the school district."

Momentum continues to build for the work of closing the achievement gaps in Seattle. The district has set new student success benchmarks for the five-year plan, which sets 2009–10 as the deadline to eliminate the achievement gaps in reading and math. Among the goals being proposed are:

■ Reducing by 20 percent a year the gap in discipline referral rates between white and minority students;

■ Increasing by 10 percent a year the number of children of color completing high school advanced learning classes;

■ And reducing middle and high school dropout rates by 10 percent a year.

In spring 2005, the NEA Foundation awarded an "innovation grant" to a team of Seattle teachers who are working to develop a collaborative, cross-curricular music program called the *Musical Markers of the African Disaspora.*

"The University of Washington is also looking at its teacher education program for things they can be doing at the university level in support for us," says Kimball, "and the state Association has embarked on a program for looking at diversity across the state system."

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www.washingtonea.org/my/local/SEAHomepage/
Home.htm

Read the full text of *SEA's Belief Statement Regarding Closing the Achievement Gap* at http://www.washingtonea.org/my/local/SEAHomepage/AchGap.html

BARGAINING OR NEGOTIATING TO CLOSE GAPS

Another advocacy tool mastered by affiliates is bargaining and negotiating either contractually or in nonbinding ways. Closing achievement gaps may present affiliates with unique opportunities to move beyond traditional topics of salary and working conditions into new territory.

The purpose of education unions is to enhance member job satisfaction, and the first step in doing that is to decrease job dissatisfaction through bargaining, grievance processing, and other traditional union services. Today, more and more educators are joining—and staying in—unions because they are looking for something that goes beyond tradition. They are seeking assistance in accomplishing the primary mission of public schools (see sidebar on page 42). To achieve true job satisfaction in public education, affiliates can focus on helping members successfully accomplish the primary mission of public schools: providing quality education at world class levels for all students by closing the achievement gaps between groups of students.

Affiliates have demonstrated that teacher and ESP contracts can address more than salaries, benefits, and working conditions. At the local level, affiliates can bargain or work collaboratively with school districts to develop language that will improve teaching and learning conditions and contribute to closing the achievement gaps. To achieve these outcomes, affiliates are often engaging in collaborative bargaining processes, interest-based bargaining, and other nontraditional approaches to negotiating with school districts.

Having a student-centered focus in bargaining doesn't mean that you don't pay attention to the needs of members. Instead, it is a shift in how you approach bargaining: what do you need to do for employees to ensure high student achievement for the maximum number of students? How do contract recommendations align with the vision and mission set by the association to close achievement gaps?

Richard Ingersoll, in his 2003 book, *Who Controls Teachers' Work? Power and Accountability in America's Schools,*[1] states "Those who are entrusted with the training of this next generation are not entrusted with much control over many of the key decisions in their work." He attributes problems with recruitment and retention in part to how schools are organized and to a lack of respect for the teaching profession. Many of these problems can be addressed through the bargaining process.

If it is important to members and helps to close the gaps, it probably should be bargained. Research identifies several working condition issues that have a positive impact on student achievement and contribute to closing achievement gaps, as shown in the sidebar "Conditions for Working and Learning" (page 49). Affilliates might also explore bargaining the use of effective, culturally responsive strategies for teaching and assessment; an increase in student time-on-task through the extension of the traditional school day and/or year; the reduction of class sizes in high needs schools and challenging subjects; and advocacy for significant teacher input on culturally relevant curricula (as well as other curriculum decisions).

Every affiliate must decide which achievement-related working conditions they want to take on in the bargaining process. Some may choose to stay within commonly accepted parameters of professional issues such as:

■ Providing coaches or mentors (e.g., peer mentors, teaching teams within or across departments or expert-novice mentors) in classrooms to support implementation of interventions without fear of evaluation or grievance ramifications;

■ Ongoing, professional development time for educators that involves them in sustained interventions of their choice that

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[1] Ingersoll, Richard M. February 2003. *Who Controls Teacher's Work? Power and Accountability in America's Schools.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

CONDITIONS FOR WORKING AND LEARNING

Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions (The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, Chapel Hill, NC, 2005) identified a number of bargaining recommendations that are connected to student achievement and closing the achievement gaps. Which of these might be useful for your affiliate to address?

- Ensure adequate professional space for teachers and paraprofessionals within school facilities.

- Ensure sufficient access to support personnel—tutors, family specialists, mental health professionals, nurses, psychologists, and social workers.

- Ensure professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to work with all learners.

- Provide extensive resources, including time for professional development design, implementation, and evaluation, and conduct an assessment of current spending.

- Provide opportunities for teachers to assume responsibility for their own professional development through formal and informal means.

- Plan professional development that is aligned with school and district goals and promotes evaluation and follow-up.

- Enhance capacity for analyzing and interpreting data to ensure professional development opportunities are based on the needs of students and teachers.

- Create a system where principals have meaningful professional development that enhances their knowledge and skills as effective instructional leaders serving students and teachers.

- Reexamine and modify the work of principals, allowing them sufficient time for effective and ongoing communication with teachers. Communication should include a shared vision for success, clear performance expectations of the school community, and regular updates on emerging policies and initiatives shaping education.

- Ensure the formal evaluation system is based on student learning and professional development that enhances teachers' knowledge and skills. An informal process of continued feedback and recognition for teacher performance should accompany the formal evaluation process.

- Ensure that principals and other school personnel are effectively supporting teachers and responding to primary concerns that prohibit teachers from improving student learning. Teacher support should be accessible, proactive, and collaborative in nature.

- Teachers should have opportunities not only to advance in teaching, but also to explore and pursue principalships.

- Structure the school day to allow sufficient time for direct planning, productive collaboration with colleagues, and overlapping time for mentors and mentees all embedded within the school day.

- To the greatest extent possible, protect teachers from nonessential duties that interfere with teaching by creating a system that allows community members, administrators, or other qualified adults to assume some of the extracurricular duties traditionally performed by teachers.

- Structure the school/district calendar to allow for meaningful professional development activities to be embedded throughout the school year.

- Create school processes and infrastructures that are responsive to teacher concerns about time and other impediments that limit available time to meet the educational needs of all students (class sizes and student loads).

- Provide teachers access to resources (financial, time, opportunity, etc.) to identify and solve problems related to their classrooms in order to ensure they can help all students learn.

- Create opportunities, both formal and informal, for teachers to influence, design, create, and implement school and district policies and procedures.

- Encourage the inclusion of teachers in state, district, school, and community level discussions related to the welfare and ability of all students to academically achieve at the highest levels.

combine study groups, workshops, curriculum development, coaching, and in-class observations over an extended length of time.

Other affiliates may choose to step further out of the box and take on potentially controversial topics like:

- Differentiated pay structures for teachers who serve as mentors/coaches to work with new teachers or in high needs programs or schools;

- Incentives for teachers to move to high needs schools;

- Involvement of existing staff in hiring, selection, and transfer decisions;

- Involvement in staffing and hiring decisions that allow selecting teachers for high needs schools and special programs—such as newcomer programs—based on demonstrated ability rather than defaulting to seniority status;

- Re-examination of voluntary versus involuntary transfer policies, seniority based systems, etc.

The decision of which issues to address will be specific to your affiliate.

ESEA BARGAINING & LOCAL POLICY GUIDE

The ESEA Bargaining Guide is a compilation of model bargaining language developed by NEA affiliates that local associations may want to use to address issues raised by the ESEA/NCLB law. It is organized into sections, each dealing with a different aspect of the law, such as curriculum and testing, paraeducator quality, transfers, wages and hours, and class sizes. It also includes negotiator notes, taken directly from the state bargaining guides. To obtain a copy of this 79-page guide, contact NEA Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy at (202)822-7080, or state affiliates can download it on *Connect* at http://connect.nea.org/esea/images/BargLPguide.pdf.

ADVOCACY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

The challenge of raising student achievement for all students is more than schools can handle on their own. That is why affiliates are encouraged to seek out partnerships with community-based and/or faith-based organizations, local public education funds and community foundations, local businesses, social services agencies, and/or others who share the vision of academic excellence for low income and culturally and linguistically diverse students, as well as students in special education programs.

Partnerships with Minority Organizations and Policymakers

The face of American public education is rapidly changing. Today, the number of ethnic minority students in our nation's schools has risen from 30 percent in the late 1980s to almost 40 percent. With the number of ethnic minority students increasing, so are the challenges they face. With the substantial gaps in achievement that exist among many of these populations, minority communities are turning away from public schools because of their frustration with schools that do not meet their needs and because of the relentless advocacy efforts of those who would privatize education. In our advocacy efforts, we will strive to meet the needs of these children, reestablish the ethnic minority community's commitment to public education, and work collaboratively with these groups to improve the quality of schools in their communities.

As part of a focused effort to reach out to minority community organizations in support of common issues in general and public education in particular, NEA helped form the Minority Community Outreach Team (MCOT). MCOT is composed of NEA and nine other organizations that, like NEA, have state and/or local chapters or affiliates. MCOT works to foster the development of collaborative activities among the state and local affiliates of all member organizations.

The sidebar on page 52 provides a list of MCOT members. Affiliates can explore developing partnerships with the state or local chapters of NEA's MCOT partners in order to increase the effectiveness of your efforts to close the achievement gaps.

The National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) and the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) have joined forces to close the achievement gaps for Hispanic and African-American children. *Closing the Gap—A Campaign Action Guide for Improving Educational Outcomes for Children* rallies targeted states (Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, and Texas) to take the necessary steps to bring quality public education to under-resourced schools. *Closing the Gap* consists of four practical components: (1) A menu of policy recommendations; (2) strategies for success to guide legislative, political, and communications activities; (3) information and funding resources to help plan, execute, and fund a campaign; and (4) a five-step checklist to help develop a written plan of action. The groups' recommendations focus on two general topics: recruiting and retaining quality teachers and improving the classroom experience.

According to NBCSL-NHCSL, many education indicators that highlight the achievement gaps also show similar gaps in groups defined by factors other than race and ethnicity. Geography and income are two leading factors in determining educational achievement, which can be linked as top targets for coalition building. NBCSL-NHCSL suggests that education coalitions could easily be built with any of the caucuses typically found in state legislatures across the country: Democratic Caucus, rural caucus, women's caucus, business leaders, labor union leaders, religious leaders, real estate industry, locally elected officials, school boards, and/or corporate roundtables.

Finally, *Closing the Gap* suggests that coalitions with a friendly governor, education commissioner, or board of education can make a big difference in the legislative process and can be helpful in advancing policy recommendations outside the legislature.

REACHING OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

Another way to partner with the community is to develop materials that provide parents and guardians with information and support in working with their children. Many affiliates provide parent brochures, pamphlets, and tip sheets that can be downloaded from their Web sites or requested from affiliate offices. Two state affiliates have gone a step beyond the norm by providing materials in other languages, in order to serve the diverse communities of their members' schools. Affiliates should contact the California and Washington affiliates for more information on the development and use of these items. NEA also provides several parent brochures, some of which were developed in partnership with the National PTA. Affiliates can download and reproduce these for members to use.

Washington Education Association booklet, available in English, Spanish, and Russian: *52 Ways To Help Your Child Learn*. Go to www.washingtonea.org and enter "52 ways" in the search box to link to the booklet.

California Teachers Association brochures: *Your Child's Education Begins at Home*, available in 11 languages, and *Seven Steps To Help Your Child Learn*, available in English and Spanish www.cta.org/FamilyInvolvement/Brochures.htm

NEA parent brochures, available in English and Spanish:

- *A Parent's Guide to Testing at Your Child's School*
- *A Parent's Guide to Raising Ready Readers*
- *A Parent's Guide to Helping Your Child Learn to Read*
- *A Parent's Guide to Choosing Supplemental Service Providers*
- *A Parent's Guide to School Involvement*
- *A Parent's Guide to Supporting School Success*

http://www.nea.org/parents/nearesources-parents.html

MINORITY COMMUNITY OUTREACH TEAM MEMBERS

ASPIRA
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League of United Latin American Citizens
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2000 L Street, NW, Suite 610
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 833-6130
www.lulac.org

National Alliance of Black School Educators
Quentin R. Lawson
310 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 608-6310
Qlawson@nabse.org
www.nabse.org

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
John Jackson
4805 Mt. Hope Drive
Baltimore, MD 21215
(410) 580-5775
www.naacp.org

National Association for Asian and Pacific American Education
Clara C. Park
Cal State University Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330-8265
(818) 677-2500 www.naapae.net

National Association for Bilingual Education
James Crawford
1030 15th Street, NW, Suite 470
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 898-1829
www.nabe.org

National Association for the Education and Advancement of Laotian and Vietnamese Americans
Dinh Vanlo
3818 S.E. 26th
Des Moines, IA 50320
(515) 778-0025
Dinh.Vanlo@dmps.k12.ia.us

NAFEA
Vietnamese Community Center
42 Charles Street, Suite 1
Boston, MA 02122
www.nafeaonline.org

The National Council of La Raza
Raul Gonzalez
1126 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 776-1760
www.nclr.org

National Indian Education Association
Lillian Sparks
110 Maryland Avenue, NE, Suite 104
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 544-7290
www.niea.org

National Urban League
Lisa Bland Malone
1101 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 810
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 898-1604, X-11
www.nul.org

Organization of Chinese Americans
Christine Chen
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 601
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 223-5500
www.ocanatl.org

United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.
James T. Martin
711 Stewarts Ferry Pike, Suite 100
Nashville, TN 37214
(615) 872-7900
www.usetinc.org

Partnering with the governor also is a valuable way to build additional coalition partners. This path to partnering is done with less fanfare than winning a legislative battle, so this strategy may not fully raise the group's profile or visibility.

In addition to its work at the national level, NEA has three programs that are designed as advocacy tools at the local level. NEA advocates for strong partnerships with the minority community and minority parents through the Minority Community Outreach Project (MCOP). MCOP works with local affiliates to forge collaborative relationships supportive of public education. The project is powered by a network of NEA members organizing in minority communities to build support for school improvement, increased minority student achievement, and policy changes in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind Act.

MCOP community organizers are active and retired teacher and ESP members who work part-time in each of the eight project sites, located in Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon (see below), Pennsylvania, and Texas. For more information about what MCOP sites are accomplishing for low-income and minority students and their communities, contact NEA Minority Community Outreach (202) 822-7746.

NEA also advocates for local partnerships through Family-School-Community Partnerships (FSCP). NEA offers FSCP training to strengthen families' and communities' commitment and ability to support their children's learning and to help educators develop effective strategies for creating family-friendly schools. The training is designed for teams of school-based educators, including administrators, family members, representatives of community-based and faith-based organizations, and others who recognize the importance of strong relationships between the community, its families, and the public schools. NEA has assembled a national cadre of trainers; to access the cadre, affiliates

MINORITY OUTREACH: AFFILIATE/ COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO CLOSE THE GAPS

In Hillsboro, Oregon, NEA's Minority Community Outreach Project (MCOP) works primarily with parents of Hispanic students. In several meetings on issues ranging from school registration to available medical care, parents learn how they can help their children succeed academically. Involvement grew from 20 parents and students at the first meeting to more than 400 only five months later.

State affiliate staff report that nearly a quarter of the students in the Hillsboro School District are Hispanic English-language learners. The small town has one of the fastest growing Hispanic populations in Oregon, but cultural differences, language barriers, and low expectations conspire to hold Hispanic students back. With that in mind, members work part-time in NEA's Minority Community Outreach Project with such

groups as the Concilio de Padres de Familia, the district's first Hispanic parent advisory council, to strengthen parents' involvement in their children's education and to help connect families.

A unique feature of this NEA program is that it supports local community members to sustain family-school-community partnerships. As the Hillsboro local staff person has reported,

"It is our belief, that to close the achievement gaps, we here in Hillsboro, Oregon, need to embrace the concept of community and school partnerships by reaching across cultural and language barriers to empower parents and help children succeed in school." And for this reason, she adamantly states, "We work as a cohesive family team and together we shout out with pride, from our family to yours, we will continue to work together to raise student achievement."

For more information on Hillsboro's project, contact Courtney Vanderstek at the Oregon Education Association, cvanderstek@nea.org, (503) 684-3300.

should contact NEA Training and Organizational Development (202) 822-7749.

NEA's Public Engagement Program (PEP) helps affiliates organize and conduct public conversations about important school issues, including closing student achievement gaps. Building community involvement by engaging community members in open conversations is a primary purpose of PEP. These conversations are unique in that they seek common ground on what are often controversial issues.

Through PEP, NEA offers financial resources, materials, and training to affiliates involved in organizing community conversations. These conversations allow community members with differing points of view to feel free to voice their opinions, thus creating a framework for community involvement in schools. For information on funding and other support, contact NEA External Partnerships & Advocacy, (202) 822-7446.

FUNDING AND POLICY

"National, state, and local policymakers must be advocates for quality education and provide a supportive policy and nonregressive tax environment that enhances rather than constrains the efforts of educators. The resources, both general and targeted, that allow the implementation of appropriate educational practices designed to close the achievement gap, must support policy." (from *Excellence and Equity: Closing the Student Achievement Gap,* from the NEA Professional Standards and Practices Committee, 2004)

FUNDING SOURCES TO HELP CLOSE THE GAPS

Securing federal, state, and private funding is an important component of leveraging your achievement gaps work. Many of the suggestions found throughout this chapter, indeed, in the entire Guide, will be easier to implement with money to support them—money for substitute teachers, extended work time, trainers, materials, meeting space, snacks for gatherings, and more.

To make long-term, systemic progress toward closing the gaps, affiliates must address funding issues at the state level. Tax policies, school funding formulas, and policies that govern how schools are funded must be examined and changed in order to provide adequate, appropriate funds for closing the gaps. In addition, researchers are beginning to take a closer look at the effect of tax breaks for businesses on local economies and social services.

NEA Research provides affiliates with a variety of resources and materials to help analyze funding issues and identifies leading thinkers on progressive tax policies. Contact NEA Research, (202) 822-7400, for more information on this work.

Funding for NEA programs must be accessed through state affiliates and regional offices. For other efforts, or to supplement NEA's support, the best approach is usually to look to local funding sources. The process begins with research—on the Internet, in published resources that might be available in your local library, and through networking with contacts in the philanthropic, nonprofit, and/or business communities. It is wise to explore many different potential sources of funding and then to view the process as an opportunity to build relationships with potential funders that will allow your affiliate to grow familiar with funders' interests, as well as allow funders to learn about and develop trust in the association.

To begin identifying potential funding sources, you might ask yourself, "Who has

the money in our community?" Even if large companies or wealthy individuals in the area may not have an established foundation or giving program, they may share the affiliates' commitment to closing student achievement gaps and they may have the flexibility to support an innovative approach. Thinking creatively about whose interests are served by having all students achieve at high levels may help you identify likely or even new partners.

Some specific resources worth consulting:

- "The Giving Forum" is a Web site that features community-specific information about foundation giving. It's on the Web at www.givingforum.org/ralocator.html and offers a variety of resources about regional associations of grantmakers. If your community has a grant-making foundation, you should consider asking to make a presentation to the grantmakers about their achievement gaps work.

- Community foundations can usually be located through the local Chamber of Commerce. These foundations generally make smaller grants, but their gifts are often easier to get and are renewable. A community foundation locator is available at www.communityfoundationlocator.org.

- The Public Education Network (PEN) is another important resource for affiliates. PEN is a national network of local education funds that work to improve public education, with a focus on poor and disadvantaged students. The funds operate in 34 states and the District of Columbia and have projects that engage the public, drive local and state policy, and support programs that ensure that every child can benefit from a quality public education. To locate a member of PEN in your area go to www.publiceducation.org.

- A related resource for funding information is the *PEN Weekly News Blast,* an electronic newsletter that always offers a listing of grant opportunities for individual educators as well as students, schools, and other organizations. To subscribe, visit www.publiceducation.org/subscribe.asp.

TITLE I FUNDS AND THE UNION

The Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association (PCTA) has received approval from the Florida Department of Education to be a provider of supplemental educational services through the federal Title I program of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind Act. Working in cooperation with the Learning Cooperative (a local nonprofit education organization) and the district's Title I office, PCTA has developed a plan to provide highly qualified teachers as tutors for low-income and minority students who need additional instruction.

PCTA has a long history of partnering with the local Title I staff on an array of service and reform projects, making the supplemental services partnership a logical next step. But the Association's approval as a provider by the state of Florida is particularly noteworthy because of the decidedly anti-union political climate in the state.

Under the program, certified, highly qualified teachers from a child's own school will tutor students in reading, math, and writing. The aim is to provide engaging activities that differ from, but are aligned with, students' regular classroom work. Students will receive computer, interactive, hands-on, and direct instruction in twice-weekly, hour-long sessions.

PCTA plans to provide services for students in both regular and exceptional education, as well as K–5 students with limited English proficiency (LEP) in both individual and small group settings. Parents and students' regular classroom teachers will receive monthly progress reports. PCTA provided tutors with specialized professional development in reading/language arts and mathematics strategies from Educational Research and Development, a research-based training provided by the American Federation of Teachers, as well as programs and materials provided by NEA.

For more information, contact Jade Moore, PCTA executive director, (727) 585-6518 (Jade.Moore@floridaea.org).

■ Government grants may be available at the state and local levels. State councils for the arts and humanities, for example, often support a considerable amount of education programming. You can find information about grants available through state governments on the Web site for your state. Think outside the box—read about the affiliate that received Title I funding in the sidebar on page 55.

■ Federal grants are highly competitive, but not impossible. The Department of Education is an obvious source, but affiliates are encouraged to look to other departments, as well, including the Departments of Energy, Justice, and Commerce. They offer grants for technology, crime-prevention, or communications programs, and your work might well fit within their guidelines. A guide to all federal agencies is available at www.fedworld.gov/gov-links.html.

■ Another source of potential funds is local or state education foundations. These foundations are often dynamic advocates for public education and raise community and business support for schools. They provide an opportunity for partnering and building supportive networks for schools and our members.

Once you've identified potential sources, you will want to consider how best to approach them. An old rule of fundraising is that "people give money to people." While foundations and businesses write the checks, individuals at the top decide where to spend their limited charitable resources. That is why developing a relationship with a funding source is so critical and why, having identified a potential source, your next objective is to develop a person-to-person contact with the relevant decision maker.

With luck, you might be able to network your way to these sources, so think about who in your local "Association family" is likely to have had contact with the individuals you'd like to reach. In addition, you may find that

you can build your own network of contacts by participating in various community development efforts, Rotary Club lunches, or other community-based organization functions, including supporting the efforts of social justice groups. Keep an eye on the pages of your local newspaper's business section; it often has information that will be useful both in identifying potential donors and in suggesting pathways to their key leaders.

NEA FOUNDATION RESOURCES

Members and teams of members are, of course, encouraged to apply for the NEA Foundation's Innovation Grants and Learning and Leadership Grants. These grant programs support high quality professional development, project-based learning, and break-the-mold innovations that raise student achievement. In making grants, preference is given to applications that address achievement gap issues. Complete details about NEA Foundation grants, as well as multiple resources about others' grants, are posted at www.neafoundation.org.

Much more information about researching grants, writing proposals, and managing grants can be found in the publication, *Think Big! The NEA Foundation: How to Get a Grant*. It is available at www.neafoundation.org/granthandbook.doc and at the "SchoolGrants" Web site at http://www.k12grants.org/.

Keep in mind the following tips from the NEA Foundation when looking for grants:

■ Take advantage of foundations' interest in closing achievement gaps, currently a "big trend" in philanthropy.

■ Seek out partners—school district grant writers, research and evaluation staff, local and state elected leaders who might support your application—in order to enhance your proposal and project.

■ Ask about foundations' proposal review processes to help you focus on areas that are more likely to be funded.

- Be realistic about getting grants; smaller, more local foundations often fund higher percentages of proposals than larger national foundations.
- Follow up, if you don't get the grant, to find out how to strengthen your next proposal.
- Establish a good communications flow if you get the grant and communicate regularly with project officers.

SUMMARY

Organizing members to take action to change policies, elect policymakers, negotiate their working conditions, or recruit new members can all have an ultimate effect on ensuring a quality public education for all students and, thus, close achievement gaps. NEA does this work well and we have the opportunity to turn our best efforts to enhancing the opportunities for millions of children. What follows in chapter 5 are specific strategies affiliates can take to create a context for closing achievement gaps as well as the NEA resources to support those strategies.

SUSTAINING THE EFFORT

- Develop training workshops to educate and inform the community about critical local and state school issues related to student achievement and closing achievement gaps, e.g., state standards, standardized tests, school attendance rates, student completion rates, as well as higher education recruitment and retention.
- Link achievement gaps issues to broader community issues, such as offering libraries, community centers, churches, and quiet places at home where students can study.
- Develop a community mapping strategy to identify allies and potential allies to broaden the support base for closing achievement gaps.
- Work with existing coalitions to create a multi-faceted coalition of public education supporters that would include both parents and nonparents of school-aged children.
- Reach out to local politicians, state legislators, and members of Congress using mailings, briefings, and visits to seek support for legislation that would contribute to closing gaps (see working conditions list, page 49).
- Create a parent and community guide to academic issues pertinent to closing achievement gaps.
- Forge partnerships that support your advocacy efforts to address progressive tax policies and obtain grant funding.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS:
CHATTANOOGA AT THE CROSSROADS

"We knew the Association was going to have to take some risky steps. It was an organizational gamble, but we asked members to submit ideas for achieving these goals."

— Gerry Dowler, UniServ coordinator, Tennessee Education Association

CHALLENGE

A stone's throw from the Georgia border, the bustling town of Chattanooga, Tennessee, stands at the junction of four interstate highways. But with a significant number of schools labeled "low performing" and teachers lured away by higher salaries across state lines, no less than the future success of Chatanooga's children stood at the crossroads.

"In 1998, our state started producing a report card of low-performing schools," says Gerry Dowler, UniServ coordinator of the Tennessee Education Association. "We had nine elementary schools on that list, four middle schools, and two high schools."

Faced with many of the same challenges to student achievement as many other urban centers—inflexible federal mandates, funding constraints, and a severe teacher shortage—Chattanooga's proximity to the Georgia border made the ability to attract and retain quality teachers a problem of crisis proportions.

"We're a poor state," says Dowler. "We sit on the Georgia border, and they pay their teachers $8-12,000 more per step, so we were losing both new and veteran teachers."

How serious a problem did this create?

"On the first day of school in 1998, we had 34 classrooms without teachers in the urban, low-performing schools," says Dowler. "As a result, the superintendent called together all his partners, and we all started to look at what we needed to do to collaborate."

ENVIRONMENT

Collaboration begins with common ground, yet Chattanooga's educators had been losing ground for some time. Although the local Association had scored a victory at the bargaining table with its new superintendent, the 14-month fight left the Association battle-scarred and lacking credibility.

"We knew the Association was going to have to take some very risky steps," says Dowler. "We needed help. That's where we began to be a partner."

The city knew that to keep Chattanooga's teachers in the state, compensation was key. But when the city's mayor in 2002 unveiled a controversial plan that offered teachers differential pay of $5,000 each year for up to three years for staying at a school, the Association balked. Mayor Bob Corker announced his Community Education Alliance plan as "a significant recruitment and retention effort aimed at honoring those high performing teachers who teach in the community's highest priority schools." The Alliance is a consortium of business leaders who target efforts to "drive up educational achievement and remove all low-performing schools in our community and on the state's 'on notice' list."

Incentive pay for teachers was a controversial cornerstone of the plan. High-performing teachers who continued to teach in a high priority school or who were recruited to one of these schools are guaranteed a $5,000 bonus each year for three years. The plan also offered 2 percent interest on mortgages to teachers who live within 20 miles of the schools. Other incentives, up to $2,000, were also made available to the entire staff, based on the schools' overall performance, and the plan called for a $10,000 bonus for principals whose schools achieve high performance.

Although some teachers stood to gain, there was potentially much for the Association to lose—the fund was being paid by private investors and based on student gain scores. To date there has been less than $500,000 spent on the incentive pay.

Incentive pay for teachers was one controversial reform item offered but the cornerstone of the great student achievement results was the vital work of investing in and training teachers and principals in cutting edge, proven "best practices."

ACTIONS

Driving the momentum for districtwide school reform were two major multi-million dollar initiatives aimed at transforming nine urban elementary schools and reinventing all 17 of Hamilton County's high schools. Funding came from the Benwood Foundation and Public Education Foundation (PEF), which awarded the city a 7.5 million dollar grant to improve student performance and enhance teacher training. The mayor's Community Education Alliance opted to coordinate its efforts with PEF's plan to improve the performance of Hamilton County's nine low-performing elementary

schools. Of the 13 members of the advisory group, Chattanooga's educators did not have a seat at the table.

ASSOCIATION INVOLVEMENT

The Hamilton County Education Association (HCEA) is the exclusive agent for the professional employees serving Chattanooga's Hamilton County school system. With full-scale, districtwide reform under way, the Association sought to involve its members in every stage of the process.

The Association conducted a survey of 2,000 teachers. While salary was certainly important, the teachers who responded to the survey said that money was not the only incentive they wanted. In fact, when asked: "If you are in an optimum situation in your school, what is the number one factor that would keep you there?" the issue of pay ranked third. What were the top two responses? Teachers indicated they wanted "a supportive administration" followed by "support with safety and discipline."

Knowing that the issue of incentive pay offered teachers was a two-edged sword for its members, HCEA advocated for changes to the ways in which teachers would qualify.

"We got them to base it not only on "value-added" gain scores but also on submitting a portfolio," says Dowler. "HCEA asked Nancy Duggin, TEA IPD manager, to help us implement the teaching standards set forth by the National Teacher Certification standards that were used to judge the portfolio and, as a result, six teachers were awarded incentive pay the first year."

Based on national research and its own studies, the Association knew that having a stable staff was key to closing the gaps. This seemed easier said than done in a district that experienced some 300 turnovers a year in staff. One school had a 90 percent turnover rate. But the Association crafted innovative transfer strategies that best met the needs of students and educators.

The Association asked its membership to consider a bid sheet transfer process. In the first two weeks in February, teachers now have the opportunity to fill out bid sheets and select five schools where they want to work. There is additional flexibility for "specialty" teaching positions such as physics. As soon as the district knows where vacancies are, it notifies the five most senior people along with two other applicants. A transfer is based on seniority unless there are other specific qualifications as listed in the contract.

"The demographics meant we could have a hand-picked leadership team of curriculum specialists, administrators, and teachers," says Dowler. "The plan also includes up to 100 hours of paid staff development, which is available to teachers during the year based on what we know are best practices. Our teachers tell us over and over that providing pertinent and applicable staff development is the single most effective way to ensure student gains."

"You also cannot produce the type of gains we have seen without first looking at the leadership teams, including curriculum specialists and reading interventionists, in each school. Often elected officials resist adequate funding in this area but it is vital to organizing a school around clear, focused goals that ensure that ALL students learn."

"Moving to collaborative bargaining was an organizational gamble, but we asked members to submit ideas for achieving the goals for closing the achievement gaps."

The gamble paid off as the Association's collaborative bargaining process is now recognized as one of the most productive models in the state.

"We are now a part of the decision-making process," says Dowler.

BIGGEST SUCCESSES SO FAR

The city of Chattanooga has been richly rewarded for its collaborative approach. In 2003, the Chattanooga School District became one of seven school systems in the country that received a Carnegie Corporation of New York High School Reform Grant of $8 million. PEF also contributed $6 million for high school reform. These funders alone have committed $21.5 million—and much more has come in from other funders.

"They were willing to fund schools that are really showing results in closing the gaps," says Dowler. What the Benwood and Carnegie initiatives have done is invest in teacher training—and HCEA has supported teacher involvement. This commitment has made funders like Carnegie and Benwood want to invest in Chattanooga's teachers and schools.

In June 2004, the Association and the Hamilton County School partnership was awarded a five-year, $2.5 million grant by the NEA Foundation for its urban education work in closing the achievement gaps. The grant will build upon the goals already under way to close the reading and math achievement gaps in five middle schools by reducing dropout rates, providing quality teachers for schools identified as low-performing, providing data to gauge continuous improvement districtwide, providing professional development for teachers, strengthening family and community partnerships, and ensuring that needy schools have highly accomplished teachers and rigorous curriculum. As a result of the early success of this initiative, the Lindhurst Foundation has shown interest in investing in the other middle schools that submit good proposals.

HCEA was involved in forming the Osborne Fellowship Initiative, a program created to provide teachers with a free master's degree that focuses on reading and other instructional strategies for urban learners. Developed in partnership with the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, the initiative was funded in 2003 through a $1.5 million five-year grant from the W.H. Osborne Foundation of Chattanooga to PEF and a $500,000 matching grant from PEF. The Association helped develop cutting-edge curriculum.

"Osborne teachers visit other schools to observe best practices," says Dowler. "They do projects together...it's very hands-on." The commitment for teachers in the cohort is two years, then three years teaching in a district school. Now in its third year, 47 teachers have graduated or are currently enrolled.

How have these efforts affected student achievement? The most important data that show success are that the number of students who are proficient or advanced on the state test has increased from 57 percent to 77 percent. The number of Hamilton County Schools that met federal accountability standards rose from 54 in 2004 to 68 schools out of 78 in 2005. According to the Hamilton County Schools System Report Card for 2004, the percentage of students found to be proficient in math and reading/language plus writing in grades K–8 improved overall and in all ethnic and socioeconomic groups. The percentage of high school students passing the Gateways state test is up in all subject areas, as is the graduation and college-bound rate. Student achievement at the high school level is going up while the dropout rate is going down.

Working together, engaged Association members, the school board, district administrators, local and national foundations, parents, city officials, and business leaders have met Chattanooga's children at the crossroads and put them on the path to future success.

Contact

Gerry Dowler, UniServ coordinator, Tennessee Education Association: gdowler@tea.nea.org; (423) 485-9535.

Hamilton County Education Association: http://hcea1.org/

GETTING THE JOB DONE: AFFILIATE ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

This third component of the NEA action framework focuses on how state and local affiliates can engage and support members as they work to close student achievement gaps. This component answers an important question: What services, resources, products, and programs can affiliates access or offer to increase members' success in helping all children achieve at high levels?

In this chapter we explore three approaches available to state and local affiliates as you assist your members' efforts to close achievement gaps. They include:

- Professional development
- Recruitment, induction, and retention of educators
- Organizing members to close the gaps

Where we are able, we identify NEA programs, products, or services that you can access to support your efforts, as well as examples of on-the-ground activities.

In contemplating the work ahead, we must recognize that achievement gaps have persisted for decades, and despite their pernicious effect on social justice, the economy, and even our democracy, what we have done as a society to fix the problem has not yet worked. If we are to close achievement gaps, we must look beyond "business as usual" approaches.

That is why the suggestions for action presented in this chapter push affiliates to expand the roles you have traditionally played in securing safe and equitable working conditions and appropriate pay for your members. Some of the arenas in which we suggest you engage require forming new alliances and identifying new issues to advance. Clearly no affiliate could pursue all of the approaches suggested here, so what follows should be understood as a menu of possibilities.

AFFILIATE ENGAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One critically important support that state and local affiliates can provide their members is professional development, either by providing professional development opportunities directly or brokering members' access to these opportunities by working in partnership with school districts, colleges and universities, public education funds or other grant-giving entities, NEA headquarters, or some combination of these. You will find some categories of professional development that contribute to closing the achievement gaps on the following pages.

Of course, high quality, continuous, data-driven professional development takes time—time for reflection, practice, evaluation, and planning. You can help your members work with school districts to find that time, using creative strategies that allow educators to grow professionally and refine their practice, for the purpose of closing achievement gaps.

Districts offer a wide variety of professional development opportunities to classroom educators. We recommend that you seek help from the state department of education, the school district, NEA, and other sources to obtain continued learning experiences in the categories outlined below. These categories are far from exhaustive, but they do at least suggest the broad range of new learning that members might need to be successful. The key is to ensure that what is offered to educators fits with their personal and school-based needs for closing achievement gaps.

Cultural Competence. Along with gaining a solid grounding in subject area content, enhancing educators' competence in instructing culturally and linguistically diverse students is an essential area of professional growth. You can help your members gain access to professional development opportunities that help teachers and ESPs:

- Choose and use culturally appropriate teaching strategies;
- Develop multiple ways of explaining content to match students' multiple ways of learning;
- Connect with and build from student interests;
- Design classrooms that encourage excellence and communicate caring.

C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps, an NEA-published guide, offers research-based classroom activities and educator self-reflections intended to engage culturally and linguistically diverse and/or low-income students in their own learning. The underlying assumption of the C.A.R.E. guide is that students have strengths on which educators can build to close achievement gaps. Seeing students' varied cultures, unidentified abilities, resilience to persevere, and untapped effort as assets, educators can be more successful in ensuring that all students achieve at high levels.

The guide is supported by a training that sets the guide's content in the context of ongoing school improvement efforts. Individual copies of the guide can be requested at hcrinfo@nea.org and downloaded at http://www.nea.org/teachexperience/careguide.html. Affiliates can find out how to access training on C.A.R.E. by contacting NEA Human & Civil Rights, (202) 822-7700 or hcrinfo@nea.org.

Diversity Training. One service that supports the development of educators' cultural competence is NEA's National Diversity Training seminars, which are delivered to NEA members through a cadre of peer trainers. The curriculum consists of five basic sessions—delivered separately or together—covering understanding cultural diversity; developing cultural identity; reacting to differences; valuing diversity in NEA; and our diverse community: living, working, and learning together, which is tailored to the experiences of education support professionals.

Affiliates can schedule this training by contacting NEA Human & Civil Rights, (202) 822-7700 or hcrinfo@nea.org.

Effective Education for English-Language Learners. Many educators face the challenge of instructing students from a variety of language backgrounds. They bring to the task the commitment to helping these students succeed at high levels. To fulfill that commitment, they often need additional preparation in:

- Creating the appropriate classroom conditions for English-language learners (ELLs) to thrive;
- Understanding how to support the development of English-language proficiency in their students;
- Building reading skills in ELLs who may not be literate in their own language;
- Adapting instructional materials to meet ELLs' needs.

Even educators with considerable experience with culturally diverse students are challenged when multiple students from a number of different language backgrounds arrive in their classrooms. The special skills needed to promote social and academic language development fall outside the normal range of even culturally competent teachers. Therefore, NEA has developed a training to enhance members' skills in instructing students whose home language is not English. The modules cover a variety of topics:

- Federal and state legal requirements;
- Basic theory regarding second language acquisition;
- Processes for identifying the language level of students;
- Strategies for developing language;

- Teaching reading;
- Teaching content areas;
- Recommended materials for ELL students, including sample lesson plans.

More information about accessing the training and the content of the modules is available from NEA Human & Civil Rights, (202) 822-7700 or hcrinfo@nea.org.

Analysis of Assessment Data. In order to choose the best classroom strategies, educators can benefit from understanding what their students' assessment results tell them about what is being learned and what is not. However, many educators need guidance in analyzing test data to be able to identify the areas that must be re-taught or taught differently. Training and practice in developing these data-analysis skills are essential to making this possible.

The *Cycle of Inquiry,* a tool designed by the Springboard Schools (formerly the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative), can help get teachers started as they think about test data and could be used in concert with the *C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps* guide to accelerate the achievement of low-performing students. The steps for using assessment data in the *Cycle of Inquiry* include:

- Moving from an understanding of the test data that show that particular students lack a set of skills (Identify Problems);
- Reflecting on how the educator interacts with these students (Ask Questions);
- Determining which instructional strategies work and which do not with these students (Set Goals);
- Committing to changing strategies that do not work and trying new ones (Design a Plan);

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The Consortium for Educational Change (CEC), a suburban Chicago project supported by the Illinois Education Association (IEA), has launched an experiment in ramping up educators' skills and knowledge of culturally competent instruction. Moving forward in partnership with the Center for Research in Educational Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) and NEA's Teacher Quality department, CEC has recruited teachers from four districts with increasingly diverse school populations to engage in a new model of professional development.

This model is unique in both content and process. The content derives from CREDE's five standards for pedagogy shown to help close achievement gaps for low-income, minority, and English-language learners (ELLs). The standards are:

1. Joint productive activity—Educators and students working together
2. Language and literacy development—Across the curriculum
3. Contextualization—Connecting to students' lives
4. Challenging activities—Designed to engage students
5. Instructional conversations—Emphasizing dialogue over lectures

The process emphasizes a research-based approach to professional development, and it helps educators build portfolios that include evidence of planning, professional dialogue, teaching, focus on student work, reflection of continuous improvement, and outcomes of peer coaching.

This experiment is being evaluated to determine its impact on student achievement, as well as its sustainability as a strategy for job-embedded, teacher-directed professional development. Of particular significance to NEA is that CREDE's five standards align with NEA's C.A.R.E. themes of Culture, Abilities, Resilience, and Effort and are matched to effective classroom strategies in *C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps.*

For more information about the Illinois experiment, contact the Consortium for Educational Change, (630) 495-0507. To learn more about NEA's support of this approach to professional development, contact NEA Teacher Quality, (202) 822-7350. To learn more about CREDE's five standards go to www.crede.org.

- Evaluating the success of new strategies by looking at students' progress (Take Action);

- Sharing the results of this trial with colleagues (Analyze Questions);

- Beginning this cycle again with a new set of students and gaps.[1]

Effective Classroom Assessments. Closing achievement gaps and recognizing the varied abilities of diverse students requires creating multiple ways of testing student knowledge at the classroom level. Again, many classroom educators may not have a wide, culturally sensitive repertoire of assessment strategies, but they are usually anxious to broaden what they know. Professional development in various ways of discerning what students are learning helps move educators along the path of closing achievement gaps.

Educators committed to closing student achievement gaps benefit from building their skills in:

- Creating a range of classroom assessments that inform teaching and improve learning;

- Synthesizing information about what culturally and linguistically diverse students know from a selection of sources, including their families and communities;

- Judging the validity, reliability, and fairness of their classroom assessments;

- Being absolutely clear about what they want their students to know and be able to do (content standards or benchmarks);

- Making clear determinations of the purposes for their assessments (why are they doing it and how the information will be used);

- Identifying who will receive the assessment results (who the audience is for this information).[2]

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[1] Springboard Schools, 2003. "Cycle of Inquiry." www.springboardschools.org. San Francisco, CA.

[2] Stiggins, Richard J. 1998. *Classroom Assessment for Student Success.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF DATA TO CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Closing Achievement Gaps

Cycle of Inquiry

1. Identify Problems
2. Ask Questions
3. Set Goals
4. Design a Plan
5. Take Action
6. Analyze Questions

Cycle of Inquiry

- Learning and using data to close achievement gaps
- Linking achievement data to achievement gaps strategies
- Identifying appropriate strategies
- Applies to both the whole school and to individual classrooms
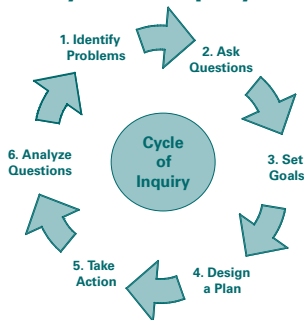
Bay Area School Reform Collaborative
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NEA Student Achievement has produced a series of reports focused on helping educators understand the complexities of student assessment. The series, written by nationally recognized authorities, includes:

- *Assessing Learning in the Classroom,* Jay McTighe and Steven Ferrara;
- *Classroom Assessment for Student Success,* Richard J. Stiggins;
- *What Teachers Need to Know About Assessment,* Lawrence M. Rudner and William D. Schafer;
- *Balanced Assessment: The Key to Accountability and Improved Student Learning,* Richard J. Stiggins;
- *Including Students with Disabilities in Assessments,* Martha Thurlow and James Ysseldyke;
- *Assessing English Language Learners,* Lorraine Valdez-Pierce.

These publications can help educators identify effective assessment strategies and better understand the assessments they currently use, which should help them with instructional decisions and in recognizing the abilities of their culturally and linguistically diverse and low-income students. Contact NEA Student Achievement, (202) 822-7350, for more information.

SCHOOL AND SYSTEM CHANGE

Even if each of our members' classrooms were perfectly organized to create success for each student, they would still need a soundly functional school and district in which to work. Affiliates can support your members' efforts to close achievement gaps, therefore, by helping to strengthen the school systems in which they operate. Such activities might include continuous improvement strategies; goal-setting and strategic planning; team building and group process skills; or skills to support small learning communities, peer coaching and mentoring, and other innovative school functions.

Of course, school districts may not immediately recognize the benefit of providing educators with these skills, so the association may have to fill this gap for them.

That said, several school districts around the country are using a process of continuous improvement and an application of the Malcolm Baldrige criteria for performance excellence to classroom instruction and closing achievement gaps. From the tiny, rural Chugach School District in Alaska to large urban districts like Montgomery County, Maryland, and Pinellas County, Florida, educators are finding that approaching classroom improvement systemically, rather than piecemeal, makes a difference in student achievement.

By examining the systems that are in place within their classrooms and schools, teachers and education support professionals can work more effectively to create optimal teaching and learning conditions.

WHAT DOES BALDRIGE HAVE TO DO WITH ACHIEVEMENT GAPS?

In 2001, the Chugach School District in Alaska received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the nation's premier award for performance excellence and quality achievement. Chugach's 214 students are scattered throughout 22,000 square miles of mostly remote areas of South Central Alaska, accessible only by air and water. Half of the students are Native Alaskans. Using the Baldrige principles of continuous improvement and systemic reform, the district improved its California Achievement Test (CAT) scores from the 28th percentile to the 72nd percentile in five years, its reading scores from 28th in 1995 to 71st in 1999, its language arts scores from 26th to 72nd, its math scores from 54th to 78th, and its spelling scores from 22nd to 65th. For more details, go to http://www.chugachschools.com/baldrige_press_release.html.

Just as solid data about a student's skills and knowledge are a prerequisite to choosing an effective instructional strategy, reliable information about the student's school is useful to choosing an improvement approach. To help in this data gathering process, NEA has developed the KEYS2.0, the second-edition diagnostic tool, Keys to Excellence for Your Schools.

KEYS2.0 assesses the effects of school organization and the environment on student learning and prepares the way for a reform process that can contribute to closing achievement gaps. The tool describes six KEYS to making decisions that benefit struggling students. They are:

- Shared understanding and commitment to high goals;
- Open communication and collaborative problem solving;
- Continuous assessment for teaching and learning;
- Opportunities for personal and professional development;
- Resources to support teaching and learning;
- Quality curriculum and instruction.

Schools committed to closing gaps are working across these areas to ensure that their students, educators, and families perceive the learning environment to be strong on all these levels. A self-assessment along these dimensions can identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. For access to more information about KEYS2.0, contact NEA Quality School Systems, (202) 822-7350.

Every school community needs a unique method of organizing the work of closing achievement gaps. The KEYS process can help identify an individual school's strengths, as well as areas in need of improvement. Other processes, including those that support continuous improvement, can help a school (or district or state) identify and meet its goals.

NEA has resources to help affiliates work with school communities to become highly productive and satisfying to the students, staffs, families, and community members who are a part of them. For more information on using continuous improvement approaches to closing achievement gaps, contact NEA Quality School Systems, (202) 822-7350, or visit the Baldrige Web site at http://baldrige.nist.gov/.

Safe Schools. Too often, children in poverty live in communities that may put them at risk of harm. Of course, every child has the right to attend a school that is free from violence and in which he or she feels safe from physical disruption. That right should be honored even though there may be threats to a child's wellbeing in the surrounding community.

In addition, schools are too often unsafe and difficult places to learn for students who are perceived as "different." One of the most common forms of bullying and harassment relates to differences of sexual orientation and gender, involving students who are, or may be perceived to be, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. All too often, such students are targeted by bullies and called names that degrade their sexuality or gender (see sidebar, page 69).

NEA's Safe Schools program helps affiliates support schools in creating a safety management program by first focusing on:

- Establishing a school safety committee;
- Developing and implementing action and crisis management plans;
- Monitoring and assessing data about such things as the incidence of gang-related activities, crime statistics, child abuse rates, community unemployment, and poverty.

Safe Schools Manual: A Resource on Making Schools, Communities, and Families Safe for Children is now available from NEA. The Manual offers research-based background, suggests ways to make schools safer through the actions listed above, identifies actions that communities can take, and shares ideas for families for reducing crime and violence in schools. Please contact NEA Human and Civil Rights

(hcrinfo@nea.org) for a copy and additional information about the Safe Schools program.

AFFILIATE ENGAGEMENT IN ENSURING TEACHER QUALITY

State and local affiliates can also help to close student achievement gaps by working with school administrators to improve the quality of teacher recruitment, induction, and retention. Recent research suggests that schools serving low-income and minority students often have the greatest difficulties attracting good teachers, helping them make the transition to being effective professionals, and then keeping them in the teaching force. What can your association do to help?

Growing Your Own Minority Teachers

Students of color often excel when their teachers are of the same ethnic or racial background as they are. As student demographics grow in diversity, the matching of student and teacher backgrounds becomes increasingly difficult.

One long-term strategy for enlarging the pool of prospective minority teachers is "growing your own" ethnic and minority candidates by supporting interested middle and high school students in their desire to teach. For example, affiliates might support Future Educators of America programs that help middle and high school students move from high school to postsecondary education and then to teacher certification. Working closely with colleges of teacher education, especially those located at historically Black, predominantly Hispanic, and traditionally American Indian and Alaska Native colleges and universities, can help districts identify minority candidates as they emerge from their programs. Partnering with community-based organizations already encouraging high school students to go on to college can also yield additional locally connected teacher candidates.

TRAINING TO 'TAKE A STAND' AND 'WALK THE TALK' FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

Students cannot learn where they do not feel safe and supported. Bias and injustice can have a profoundly negative effect on students' well-being and educational achievement. To support school personnel in creating safe learning environments for all students, NEA has partnered with the NEA Health Information Network, the American Federation of Teachers, and the Respect for All Project to create a new national training program focused on school safety and diversity.

The training program consists of two training modules, each 90 to 120 minutes in length, intended for approximately 20 to 30 participants. Both modules are designed for school personnel who may not yet be familiar or even comfortable with the issues involved. The first module, "Taking a Stand: Creating Safe Schools for All Students," is designed for all school personnel at the K–12 level. Using video clips, interactive activities, and group discussion, "Taking a Stand" introduces participants to the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that bias plays out in schools and offers resources for challenging bias and creating schools that are safe for all students, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The second module, "Walking the Talk: Classroom Resources for Addressing Bias," is a more advanced workshop designed for K–12 classroom instructors of all subject areas. Using interactive activities and group discussion, "Walking the Talk" examines an array of approaches to designing and integrating lessons that raise awareness of bias and empower students to become advocates for change, especially around bias against individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered.

For additional details about the training, contact NEA Human and Civil Rights, (202) 822-7700 or hcrinfo@nea.org.

Investing in ESPs as Prospective Teachers

Another potential pool of culturally and linguistically diverse educators is education support professionals (ESPs). Affiliates can encourage these educators to pursue teaching careers by making tuition support for ESPs interested in pursuing teaching careers a bargaining point in contract negotiations. Affiliates might also collaborate with state departments of education, colleges, and school districts to provide professional development to help ESPs complete their degrees.

Investing in ESPs offers an additional advantage to schools struggling to close achievement gaps: ESPs are often closely tied to the communities of the schools they serve and they often reflect the diversity of the students. Of course, this potential hiring pool is only available if the district has shown the foresight to hire ESPs who are from the home community of students and who speak students' home languages. Affiliates can also play a role in ensuring that ESP hiring reflects the diversity of the student body.

MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

NEA Teacher Quality has made grants available to help state affiliates recruit and retain minority teachers. With programs focusing on high school students, education support professionals, new teachers, and teacher mentors, state and local affiliates are taking multiple approaches to increase the numbers of Black, Hispanic, and Native American educators.

The Colorado Education Association and the Poudre Education Association are promoting a Future Hispanic Educators of America program as well as an ESP to Teacher effort.

The South Carolina Education Association is making progress in providing test-taking services, minority recruitment activities, and mentoring for Black college students and new teachers. The Association is partnering with local Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The South Dakota Education Association is focusing its efforts on attracting and training American Indians to teaching careers through its ESP to Teacher program.

For more information about these and other grants, please contact NEA Teacher Quality, (202) 822-7350.

PRAXIS Preparation

Black and Hispanic teacher candidates too often fall into an access gap because of their disappointing performance on teacher quali-fying tests. Even after successfully completing coursework and student teaching experiences, many minority teachers are unable to clear the final hurdle of the PRAXIS exam to enter the teaching profession.

Affiliates can partner with teacher preparation institutions, NEA Student Program affiliates, and other student groups to help ensure that minority teacher candidates are well prepared to pass credentialing exams like PRAXIS. Many affiliates are offering teaching candi-dates opportunities to practice the strategies needed to pass the PRAXIS through work-shops and access to the test preparers practice materials, as well as coaching them on con-tent, writing techniques, math, and analytic skills.

Through grants to state affiliates, NEA has helped create a coaching process to provide minority teacher candidates with the skills needed to be more successful with PRAXIS, including dealing with test anxiety manage-ment. NEA has partnered with the Educational Testing Service—the PRAXIS test maker—as well as state affiliates, colleges and universities (particularly historically Black and predominantly Hispanic serving institutions), and other concerned parties to provide this assistance.

To learn more about NEA's efforts to support state affiliates' involvement in increasing can-didates' PRAXIS success, contact NEA Teacher Quality, (202) 822-7350.

Beyond Minority Educators

Given the large demographic differences between today's diverse student population and the relatively homogenous pool of would-be teachers, the harsh reality is that the efforts described above will not on their own solve the problem of identifying, developing, and recruiting enough minority teachers.

In light of this, affiliates may want to work with teacher preparation institutions in their states to help them do a better job of prepar-ing the majority of new educators to con-tribute to closing achievement gaps. Preparing educators to have the cultural competence, family and community outreach skills, capacity to work in collaboration with other adults, and abilities to be effective with English-language learners can provide mem-bers with skills that are needed to help close achievement gaps.

AFFILIATE ENGAGEMENT IN PRAXIS PREPARATION

The Georgia Association of Educators (GAE) offers an online PRAXIS I and II tutorial to members who attend a preparatory workshop. Member categories include students and paraprofessionals, as well as certified teachers. Members who access the online resources work with practice questions, writing rubrics, and other useful tools that increase pass rates. An additional benefit has been an increase in stu-dent membership that has earned a Georgia affiliate staff per-son the 2005 state student organizer award and GAE an award for greatest student member increase.

For more information, contact Sally Bennett at the Georgia Association of Educators, (678) 837-1100 or sally.bennett@gae.org.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TO CLOSE THE GAPS

To advance the goal of closing achievement gaps for low-income, minority, and English-language learning students, association members must have high expectations for themselves, their students, and their associations. Having all students achieving at high levels requires breaking new ground in classrooms, schools, districts, and affiliates. Educators who build communication, decision making, and leadership skills have the capacity to be role models for their students and effective change agents in their local and state associations. Affiliates' investment in developing their members as advocates and leaders yields returns for students, schools, and the affiliate.

Many Association members have stressed the need for stronger and more consistent building leadership on achievement gaps issues. They observe that even when they are able to make gains in closing the gaps through innovative strategies and collaborative relationships with communities, their building leadership is not always supportive. They also have seen that those leaders who do support such efforts are pulled from the school to be sent elsewhere.

As a consequence, the affiliate may need to become active in cultivating and supporting members interested in becoming building leaders. These educators will be prepared to carry with them into the administrative ranks the commitment to closing student achievement gaps. While this may seem an unusual direction for an affiliate to take, it holds the promise of creating more opportunities for buildingwide leadership to emerge from among the affiliates' members.

Another focus of leadership development is cultivating members who will become leaders inside the association to advocate for closing achievement gaps. Closing achievement gaps requires break-the-mold thinking and innovative action on the part of affiliates. To sustain movement in this direction, leaders must come from the ranks of committed school-based educators.

With this in mind, NEA offers training opportunities for women and minority members to prepare them for leadership responsibilities in the Association. The skills, attitudes, and knowledge gained through these opportunities can contribute to members' abilities to press for a greater role in creating high-functioning schools and districts.

NEA Human and Civil Rights offers women's and minority leadership training seminars on topics ranging from how to assess and strengthen one's leadership skills to message development for public education advocates. To learn more, contact NEA Human and Civil Rights about the Women's Leadership Training Program or the Minority Leadership Training Seminars, (202) 822-7700 or hcrinfo@nea.org.

Hiring Processes To Help Close the Gaps

The hiring practices of districts and schools serving low-income and minority students often create barriers to attracting teachers best suited to helping close the achievement gaps. Often, districts wait to fill vacant teaching slots until late summer or after classes have started. By that time, the most talented candidates are likely to have taken other jobs. One study showed that high-income schools were more than three times more likely than low-income schools to hire their staffs before school starts.[3]

Local affiliates may be able to work with chronically late hiring schools and districts to help them anticipate their hiring needs earlier and advertise at a more promising time of year, which could attract better candidates. This suggestion has implications for negotiated hiring and transfer processes, but affiliates might be willing to explore what it would take to move hiring to the school level, while

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[3] Johnson, Susan Moore. March 4, 2005. "Supporting and retaining the next generation of teachers." *NEA Visiting Scholars Series Research Brief*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

still protecting and empowering members. Educators stand to gain a hiring process that better reflects schools' actual staffing needs (e.g., bilingual, ethnically diverse, culturally competent) and a chance to attract more experienced teachers to difficult-to-staff schools.

In geographically isolated districts where a culturally and linguistically diverse student population is a new phenomenon, affiliates can help to insert needed creativity into the hiring process, helping districts develop sound strategies for recruitment. These might include:

- Increasing hiring from colleges and universities in the region by encouraging partnerships between the colleges and universities, districts, and affiliates;

- Running joint affiliate/district advertising campaigns that promote the district as a good place to work and live;

- Completing bargaining earlier to be able to advertise actual salaries;

- Using teachers as part of recruitment efforts, including interview teams, to connect candidates with future colleagues.

Highly Qualified *With* Credentials

An even more critical aspect of hiring is whether new hires have the appropriate credentials. Even with the current emphasis on "highly qualified" educators, districts serving low-income and minority students still have a strong tendency to ignore standards and hire teachers without full credentials. In one large western district, for example, as many as 30 percent of teachers are uncredentialed, with the highest proportion in schools serving low-income students.[4]

Both the association and members suffer from this practice. The association suffers because it is difficult to maintain a stance of professionalism when the employer subverts accountability with actions that presume "anyone can teach." Members suffer because they are left having to pick up the slack for colleagues who have not had adequate training.

In those instances where the vacancies are numerous and credentialed applicants are few, affiliates can press districts for mentoring and induction programs to help inexperienced educators adjust to the learning environment. Partnerships with institutions of higher education can give new hires accelerated access to high-quality programs to prepare them for the classroom.

Retention Strategies To Help Close the Gaps

A similar problem that most struggling schools face is retaining high quality, experienced teachers. Districts' common practice of placing the least experienced teachers in the schools and classrooms where students need the most care and instructional attention only compounds the problem. Affiliates' seniority policies also contribute to this practice. Affiliates may want to explore three possible strategies:

- Work with districts to create incentives—either financial or in terms of workplace conditions—to attract experienced teachers to schools serving students who fall into the achievement gaps categories;

- Work with districts to develop a cap on the number of new teachers in any given school;

- Work with districts to improve induction and mentoring opportunities. For example, in schools with a certain proportion of new teachers (e.g., 25% or more), at least some experienced teachers may have free time to mentor and coach new teachers.[5]

While this is not an exhaustive list of approaches, it should give you ideas to explore with your districts.

[4] Ladson-Billings, Gloria. March 17, 2005. "The 'simple logic' of the highly qualified teacher provisions of NCLB." Paper presented at NEA Visiting Scholar Series. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

[5] Ladson-Billings.

Managing the Retention Challenge

While retention is a challenge for all school districts, it is a particular problem for those facing sizable achievement gaps. National data show that within five years of hiring, between 40 to 50 percent of all beginning teachers have left the profession.[6] Some factors that contribute to new elementary teachers leaving include:

- When they are hired—before or after classes have started;

- The amount of contact they have with experienced teachers;

- The amount of flexibility they have in teaching language arts and math.

For all these factors, new teachers serving low-income students fall short: They are far more likely to be hired after the first of the school year, they have significantly less contact with their "mentors," and they have much less flexibility in their teaching because of mandated test preparation.[7]

Affiliates can work with districts to create mentoring and induction opportunities likely to increase retention of new teachers in gaps closing schools by:

- Offering a general induction program that includes a seminar for beginning teachers and regular communications with administrators;

- Providing helpful mentors who teach in the new teacher's field;

- Creating common planning time with other teachers in their subject areas;

- Supporting time for new teachers to collaborate with other teachers on instructional issues;

- Connecting with external networks that reinforce and inspire new learning;

- Decreasing the number of course preparations.[8]

Closing student achievement gaps presents state and local affiliates with multiple opportunities for partnerships, programs, products, and services to members. While no affiliate will be able to take on all the challenges presented here, the strategic selection of a few approaches could make a difference for members and the students they serve.

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[6] Ingersoll, Richard, and T. Smith. 2003. "The wrong solution to the teacher shortage." *Educational Leadership* 60(8): 30-33.

[7] Johnson.

[8] Ingersoll and Smith.

MILWAUKEE—WALKING THE HIGH WIRE TO CLOSE THE GAPS

The dilemma was "how to manage the high wire act and at the same time provide a quality teacher for every child."

— **Sam Carmen**, executive director, Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association

CHALLENGE

Under the "Big Top," balancing on the high wire requires uncommon skill, extreme flexibility, and nerves of steel. For Milwaukee educators, closing the gaps in the face of high poverty, low funding, and rampant teacher turnover requires much of the same.

"There is a concentration of poverty in the cities relative to the surrounding metropolitan areas," says Sam Carmen, who has served as executive director of the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA) for 11 years. "The critical issues have gotten much sharper in the wake of No Child Left Behind, which is particularly vexing for urban school districts."

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) began to shine the spotlight on the increasing gaps in achievement for students of color over the past four or five years, says Carmen. While seeking to address the multiple factors that contribute to the gaps—such as increasing class sizes and inadequate resources—the district had a particular urgency to recruit certified teachers to fill the persistent vacancies that existed.

The dilemma, says Carmen, was "how to manage the high wire act and at the same time provide a qualified teacher for every child."

ENVIRONMENT

One thing was clear. The task of raising the achievement levels of Milwaukee's school children, particularly for students of color, was too daunting to take on alone. In 1999, Title II Teacher Quality Grants—made available by the U. S. Department of Education during the Clinton administration—set the stage for the formation of a citywide collaboration. The Milwaukee Partnership Academy is a dynamic alliance among the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), the Milwaukee Public Schools, the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors, the Milwaukee Area Technical College, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce, and the Private Industry Council of Greater Milwaukee. The Academy's goal is to increase student achievement through better preparation, recruitment, and retention of teachers for urban schools as well as to provide professional development for education support professionals, especially those of color, to become teachers.

As the largest provider of certified teachers and administrators to Milwaukee Public Schools, the University of Wisconsin solidly acknowledged its critical role.

"It's not just up to Milwaukee Public Schools," said Nancy Zimpher, a professor of education and chancellor of UWM from 1998–2003.

In 1999, the Academy was awarded a multi-million dollar Title II grant that enabled it to begin implementing its three-pronged action plan.

ACTIONS

With the goal of creating a link between academic teacher preparation and urban classroom practice, the Academy initiated the Teachers in Residence program, a five-year program funded by the Title II grant.

A team solicited applications and selected 20 experienced teachers from Milwaukee Public Schools to build a closer connection with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). Housed within the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in various schools of education around the city, the program requires teachers to complete a leadership development program taught by a UWM professor. The Leadership Institute consists of graduate level coursework during fall and spring semesters as well as an intensive summer session. The teachers then become responsible for teaching introductory courses in area schools of education and schools of arts and sciences. Each teacher in residence accepts responsibility to continue working in one of five specialty areas: teacher recruitment, preparation, retention, curriculum development, and cultural and community support.

Part two of the Academy's strategy seeks to provide quality teachers with quality curriculum.

"There had been a lack of focus on curriculum for quite a while," says Carmen. "We had to anchor down on teaching and learning."

The district adopted a curriculum reform strategy called "balanced literacy." The goal is to have all children performing at grade level in reading, writing, and math. Each school is assigned a full-time, on-site literacy coach to offer professional development. Teams of teachers and literacy coaches work together in the classroom, but the Academy also engages the entire school community to make the literacy connection for kids, providing tools and training for parents, administrators, and other stake-

holders. Now in its fourth year of implementation, the Academy is in the process of collecting authentic data to assess where improvements to the curricula might be needed.

A subset of the Academy, the Milwaukee Mathematics Partnership was formed with the Milwaukee Area Technical College. The communitywide collaborative engages the public schools and the university, as well as union, government, business, and community organizations to substantially improve mathematics achievement for Milwaukee's 100,000 public school students. Mathematics faculty and K–12 educators work together to strengthen district curricula, refine student assessment measures, and redesign pre-service and in-service teacher preparation to meet the needs of the urban environment. A network of two- and four-year colleges and universities will be established to focus on the math preparation and professional development of P–12 teachers and to improve the transition of students to post-secondary education.

Widespread community engagement was the third focus of the Academy's overall strategy to close the gaps. Spurred by controversial comments by comedian Bill Cosby and political columnist Eugene Kane on the educational and parental problems in Black America today, a group of administrators, teachers, building-level principals, central office administrators, and others formed the Metropolitan Milwaukee Alliance of Black School Educators (MMABSE). Formerly the Black Administrators Council, MMABSE's goal was simple—to "turn the tide of academic failure for African-American children." In October 2004, MMABSE invited Dr. Cosby to speak to the community and issue a challenge for change. A number of task forces were created in light of that dialogue as the community began to coalesce around closing the gaps and other challenges of the urban community.

ASSOCIATION INVOLVEMENT

A core member of the Academy and MMABSE, the Association brings the expertise, experience, and voice of its 9,000 members to the table. The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association represents 6,600 professionally certified educators; 2,000 educational assistants; 500 substitute teachers; and 22 accountants and bookkeepers. Working collaboratively, the Association has helped formulate and carry out the dual goals of improving teacher quality and student achievement. Moreover, MTEA has

initiated parental and community outreach on its own.

In April 2005, MTEA hosted a workshop for parents of Milwaukee Public School students entitled, "Side by Side: Parents and Students Succeeding Together." Topics included study skills, test-taking, and parent leadership. In October 2005, MTEA hosted its tenth Annual Milwaukee Conference on School, Family, and Community Partnerships with sessions on school funding, partnering with the media, grant writing, and parental involvement at the middle and high school levels. The Association also has created the Community Volunteer Network, an online resource to help schools recruit volunteers and increase parental and community involvement.

The Association further demonstrates its commitment to the ongoing work of closing the gaps at the bargaining table. Using the solid national research of the *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future* and *Public Agenda* reports to inform its process, the bargaining team, according to Carmen, brings "a cross-pollination—an alignment in legislature and the community to the bargaining table."

BIGGEST SUCCESSES SO FAR

The skill needed to walk the high wire is acquired over time. Closing the achievement gaps for Milwaukee's children cannot be accomplished overnight. But much of the work of engaging stakeholders, developing successful strategies, and working collaboratively already is being accomplished by the Milwaukee Partnership Academy, of which MTEA is an integral part.

"We invited MMABSE to do a presentation to the Academy," says Carmen, "which got us to the point of asking for an NEA Foundation grant."

In June 2005, the NEA Foundation and NEA awarded the Milwaukee Partnership Academy a grant of up to $2.5 million over five years to close the achievement gaps by 2010. The grant is designed to supplement and build upon existing initiatives. Using the resources of its part-

ner organizations, the funding provided by the NEA Foundation, and the expertise of education professionals, the Academy has a charge to:

- Reduce the dropout rate, improve academic performance, and increase the rate at which students go to college without the need for remediation;
- Ensure that every low-performing school in the district has well-qualified, highly accomplished staff;
- Use data to develop and support districtwide systems of continuous improvement;
- Empower teachers and staff leaders to make instructional decisions that improve student performance;
- Strengthen partnerships with families and the civic, business, and philanthropic sectors;
- Ensure that needy schools have highly accomplished teachers and that all students have the instructional support necessary to succeed with a rigorous curriculum.

"It's gotten our work focused and has allowed us to bring MMABSE's efforts and our efforts together," says Carmen. Walking the high wire is always tricky business, but Milwaukee's educators and community working together provides the perfect balance needed to go all the way.

Contact:

Sam Carmen, executive director, Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association: Carmens@mtea.weac.org, (414) 259-1990; www.mtea.org/

Metropolitan Milwaukee Alliance of Black School Educators, www.mmabse.org

Milwaukee Partnership Academy, www.uwm.edu/Org/MPA/

Teachers in Residence, http://soe.uwm.edu/tir/

ORGANIZING MEMBERS TO CLOSE THE GAPS

The purpose of organizing is to guide people into a sense of their own power to create positive change. Grassroots organizers are fond of quoting anthropologist Margaret Mead's famous exhortation on the subject: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

In the current policy context, organizing is all the more important for affiliates because members often feel battered on both sides by the stringent requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the still-widening achievement gaps. To be successful at closing the gaps, you must organize your members around issues that can make a difference.

Choosing Issues

Issues organizing can only focus on a few issues, not on a long list of concerns. How can you choose one or more issues from the wide range of possibilities?

First, you should decide which particular achievement gaps issue or group of issues makes the most sense in your particular context. This relates in large part to the factors you identified in chapter 3 that contribute to the gaps. For example, large class sizes may be a contributor or the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education classes may contribute to the gaps.

The Midwest Academy, a school that teaches a special type of organizing called "direct action organizing," has developed a checklist for choosing issues. A "good" issue is one that matches most of these criteria.

■ **The issue results in improvement or change that can be seen or measured.** For example, organizing around an initiative to recruit and retain highly qualified minority teachers should result in increasing numbers of such teachers. And if this issue is advanced as a way to increase students' reading performance, let's say, then the organizing effort around it could include information on improvements in reading achievement.

■ **The issue is worthwhile and felt widely and deeply.** Members want to feel that they are fighting for something about which they feel good—a cause that merits the effort. And they must feel that achievement gaps are a real problem and agree with the goals you have advanced to close the gaps. It is not enough for a few members to feel strongly—wide support is needed.

■ **The issue is winnable.** The issue cannot be so large or the solution so remote, that you and your members are overwhelmed. Members must perceive from the start that they have a good chance of winning or at least that they are part of a good strategy for winning. It is also important to figure out how much money any issues campaign will cost your opponents and how much they are likely to spend to defeat you. For example, if you have decided on a campaign to defeat school vouchers you may be facing voucher proponents with well-funded campaigns of their own.

■ **The issue is easy to understand, nondivisive, and consistent with your mission and goals.** In general, a good issue should not require a lengthy and difficult explanation. Nor does it pit member against member, old against young, Black against white, etc. In addition, any issue you select needs to be consistent with your mission, the goals you have identified related to your affiliate's role in closing the gaps, and your external message or voice on the gaps.

A successful issues campaign gives those who are involved their own sense of power and it alters power relationships. Members who are involved in an issues campaign related to closing the gaps should come away from the campaign feeling that they have won a victory. Such ownership and involvement builds the confidence to take on additional issues as well as loyalty to the association. And each time an affiliate carries out a successful issues

campaign that results in tangible improvement or change, the association is strengthened. This can change the power dynamics with other organizations in the state or local community.

Successful issues organizing also can and should build organizational leadership for tomorrow's efforts, something you will need to plan for deliberately. Training is an important part of the campaign to help members build their leadership skills. Ideally, organizing around one issue sets up the affiliate for the next issues campaign, so consider the skills members develop and the contacts they make as data in planning the next issues campaign.

This means, of course, that issues campaigns need to operate on a timeline with an end point in sight. That timeline should be sensitive to major events in the calendar year, such as summer vacations, holiday breaks, electoral calendars, key association meetings, and events that may require extensive planning by staff, leaders, and members.

There are a wide range of issues related to closing achievement gaps around which you can organize affiliate activities. The suggestions in the "Issues for Organizing Members To Close Achievement Gaps" (page 80-81) tool are just a partial list. Note that work on most of these issues can be pursued at the level of the worksite, school district, or state, depending, of course, on the interest and resources of the organization. The advocacy taken may range from pressing for policy changes at the school or district level to legislative amendments and campaigning for new leadership.

MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZING

The organizational tools you have developed by reading and using this Guide can be used to recruit, reclaim, and retain members. The tools are: the mission statement you reviewed and, if needed, revised in chapter 2; the goals you fashioned in Chapter 2 that describe what your affiliate will do to help close the gaps;

the easy-to-understand message you developed in chapter 3 that enables you to articulate a powerful, knowledgeable voice on this issue; and the advocacy topics and actions that you can undertake as outlined in chapter 4. All four of these efforts tell prospective members that you are focusing on significant issues facing public education—and issues that they are likely experiencing in some form in the schools, districts, and communities in which they work.

As you know, affiliates turn potential members into actual members, and less active members into activists, by identifying and addressing their concerns. We believe that achievement gaps will be a concern to many prospective and current members. Involving every member in association activities that you undertake to close the gaps is also vital to strengthening membership.

In addition, affiliates that are successful in recruiting and maintaining members make membership a top priority all year long. That is, they emphasize membership—both growth and the need for active members—at all meetings and in all publications, and they develop budgets that include funding for annual membership recruitment training sessions and membership promotion activities. There is no reason why some of these cannot focus on closing achievement gaps or on one or more specific issue(s) related to the gaps.

Finally, membership is grounded in information about the Association, including efforts to close the gaps. Successful affiliates show members what we have done, can do, and will do as an Association around closing the gaps and other issues. And they help prospective and current members understand what these activities mean for them. They also make it their goal to get people to want to join the Association by creating a sense of ownership and pride in what it does, including efforts to close the gaps. The more people who know about the Association's programs and activities, the more people who can give direct, personal testimony about what can be accomplished collectively.

ISSUES FOR ORGANIZING MEMBERS TO CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Which of these issues are priorities for your members as they work to close achievement gaps? How can you use those priorities to attract and retain members and mobilize your members for action?

Accountability

NEA believes that schools should share accountability with education employees, policymakers, and parents—all with the ultimate goal of helping every student succeed. In addition, any discussion of accountability must take into account how well state standards and expectations are aligned with, that is, consistent with, curricula, instructional materials, and classroom practices. For example, is your district holding students and teachers accountable for lessons they have not been taught?

Attracting and Retaining Qualified Teachers

While student enrollments are rising rapidly, more than a million veteran teachers are nearing retirement. Experts predict that we will need more than 2 million new teachers in the next decade. This teacher recruitment problem, which has reached crisis proportions in some areas, is most acute in urban and rural schools, and for high-need subject areas such as special education, math, and science, as well as for teachers of color. How should the association be involved in this issue? What partnerships or coalitions should be formed around this issue?

Class Size

NEA recommends class sizes of 15 students in regular programs and even smaller classes in programs for students with exceptional needs. How is the state or local school district addressing class sizes? Are the limits for special education classrooms in compliance with state law? Which students are affected most by large class sizes? How does this issue affect student achievement? For a range of information on class size reduction and abstracts of key research studies supporting small classes, we recommend visiting the Web site http:www.reduceclasssizenow.org.

Dropout Rates of Minorities

According to a recent study by the Harvard Civil Rights Project, every year, across the country, a dangerously high percentage of students—disproportionately poor and minority—disappear from the educational pipeline before graduating from high school. Nationally, only about 68 percent of all students who enter ninth grade will graduate "on time" with regular diplomas in twelfth grade. About half of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students will earn regular diplomas alongside their classmates. Graduation rates are even lower for minority males.[9] What are the achievement gaps and civil rights issues the association could organize around to address the dropout rates in your school and/or in your district?

Early Childhood Education

Research shows that a high quality education in the years before a child turns five yields significant long-term benefits. What is your state and/or school district doing, or not doing, to advance early childhood education? What is the impact on student achievement?

Mentoring Beginning Teachers

The main problem cited by new teachers is the "lack of support." As the teacher shortage worsens, the problem for school districts is increasingly one of retention rather than recruitment. Districts struggle with high turnover rates, as teachers flee the profession, in large part, due to the lack of assistance on the job. New teachers need practical, ongoing support in the classroom. NEA supports mentoring programs for beginning teachers. How is your school district addressing the shortage? What is your affiliate doing to mentor and support new teachers?

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[9] Orfield, Gary, Daniel Losen, and Johanna Wald. 2005. "Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis." *Harvard Education Publishing Group, Executive Summary.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Civil Rights Project.

ISSUES FOR ORGANIZING MEMBERS TO CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS (CONTINUED)

Minority Student Enrollment in Honors and Advanced Placement Courses

According to the Pathways to College Network, low-income and minority students are much less likely to be in accelerated tracks than other students and are often underrepresented in academically challenging programs that are the "gateways" to college—Advanced Placement, Gifted and Talented, National Honor Society, and International Baccalaureate. What policies can affiliates identify that would address this issue? How can your affiliate identify programs that have succeeded in attracting ethnic minorities to college preparatory programs? What outreach is needed to support families of low-income and minority students in accessing college planning information and services?

Quality Programs To Support English-Language Learners

Current demographic trends suggest that any educator has a high probability of interacting with English-language learners (ELLs) at some point in his/her career. Is your state and district requiring training in English as a second language (ESL) and/or second language acquisition methodology for all pre-service teachers across the certification and content areas? Are alternative certification programs including preparation that supports ELLs?

Representation of Minorities in Special Education Classes

Since its passage in 1975, IDEA has brought tremendous benefits. Approximately six million children with disabilities now enjoy their right to a free, appropriate public education. However, minority children with disabilities all too often experience inadequate services, low-quality curriculum and instruction, and unnecessary isolation from their nondisabled peers. What policies and practices does your school district use to determine eligibility for special education classes? How does the district ensure that special education classes don't become "dumping grounds" for self-directed, spontaneous students?

Vouchers

Teachers, parents, and the general public have long opposed private school tuition vouchers—especially when funds for vouchers compete with funds for overall improvements in America's public schools. Are there efforts in your community in support of vouchers? How will your association address this issue?

Zero Tolerance Policy Effect on Minorities and Low-income Students

Decades of research have shown that students of color are disproportionately disciplined in school. According to the U.S. Department of Education's report, *The Condition of Education 1997,* 25 percent of all African-American students, nationally, were suspended at least once over a four-year period. Are similar policies affecting minority student achievement in your school or district today? What is your Association's involvement in shaping discipline policies that balance safety and access?

In addition to these issues, NEA's federal legislative program (*NEA Legislative Program for the 109th Congress, 2005*) contains a full range of issues that support quality public education, student achievement, members' voice in the workplace, and good public policy—many of which contribute to the closing of achievement gaps.

SUSTAINING THE EFFORT

- Identify the key suppliers of new teachers in your state and engage those colleges of education in discussions to build partnerships that improve teacher preparation for closing the gaps and align teacher preparation with local and state needs.

- Develop partnerships with other educational organizations—administrator groups, professional development consortiums, subject-area organizations—to pool resources and maximize professional development opportunities for your members.

- Offer opportunities for new teachers to become involved in work groups that focus on issues that are important to their professional lives as a way to begin engaging them in activism for the association.

SUMMARY

NEA offers a wide range of programs, products, and resources to engage and support affiliates in closing the gaps. By focusing on providing high-quality professional development for members; strengthening recruitment, induction, and retention of teachers; and organizing members around key issues, affiliates can help to close the achievement gaps in their schools.

CLOSING GAPS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

NEA's IDEA Special Education Resource Cadre assists members nationwide with obtaining information about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and special education best practices. The Resource Cadre provides professional development to the wide spectrum of individuals involved with a child's education. Its modules offer strategies that have clear potential for closing the gaps experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse students. For example,

- Disproportionality: Truth in "Labeling": Some culturally and linguistically diverse populations are over- or under-represented in special education programs resulting in disproportionate assignment in many of our schools and states. This presentation shares what the research says and what educators can do.

- Differentiated Instruction To Meet the Needs of All Students: The growing diversity in classrooms makes it difficult to reach students at varying skill levels. This presentation demonstrates practice strategies for differentiating instruction so that all students can be engaged in learning.

- IDEA and ESEA: The Intersection of Access and Outcomes: Several key components of IDEA were affected by the so-called No Child Left Behind Act. This presentation reviews the impact of the law in the areas of student assessment, accountability (AYP), school choice and supplemental services, teacher quality and paraeducator quality.

Requests for Cadre presentations may be made to NEA Student Achievement, (202) 822-7350.

AFTERWORD

NEA has made closing the achievement gaps the centerpiece of its work for members. Through its focus on voice, we want to establish the Association as a knowledgeable advocate for closing the achievement gaps, creating a shared understanding of what the achievement gaps are, what it means to close the gaps, and what NEA's role is in closing them. NEA's work in advocacy is geared toward providing information, research, and guidance to affiliate leaders to enable them to change bargaining agreements, state regulations, or state laws to effect changes that improve working conditions and help reduce the achievement gaps. And, finally, NEA is improving its affiliate engagement and support in order to provide programmatic assistance to state and local affiliates in areas that are proven to eliminate the achievement gaps.

We hope this Guide will help affiliates:

- Examine their capacity to take on this important work;
- Focus their efforts on specific, high-priority achievement gaps;
- Work in partnership with other key stakeholders whose involvement is key to addressing factors that contribute to the gaps;
- Bring their experience in organizing, political action, and negotiating/bargaining to this issue;
- Ensure members' access to high-quality professional development;
- Take steps to recruit, induct, and retain quality teachers;
- Access NEA programs and products;
- Secure additional funds to support members' efforts to close the gaps;
- Engage in activities that will both initiate and sustain these efforts over time.

Gaps in achievement persist across the nation and in every state, driven by multiple, often complex, and, nearly always interrelated factors. Closing the gaps will not be easy, but we have argued in this Guide for an active Association role in this important national agenda. This will require affilliates to focus on mobilizing parent and community support for the long haul and to build structures that will support their work in this area.

The Association has long been committed to ensuring that all students succeed in school. Helping our members as they work to close the student achievement gaps is simply the right thing to do.

RESOURCE LIST

Following is a list of the books, research papers, reports, organizations, and Web sites that were referenced throughout the *Guide*.

Articles, Books, Papers, Reports

Adams, Marianne, Leanne Bell, and Pat Griffin. 1997. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice.* New York, NY: Routledge.

C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps. 2005. Washington, DC: NEA Human and Civil Rights. Request up to five copies at hcrinfo@nea.org or download at http://www.nea.org/teachexperience/careguide.html.

Closing the Gap—A Campaign Action Guide for Improving Educational Outcomes for Children. The National Black Caucus of State Legislators and the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL). Contact the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators at (202) 434-8070 for copies.

The ESEA Bargaining Guide. Washington, DC: NEA Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy. http://connect.nea.org/esea/images/

Ingersoll, Richard and T. Smith. 2003. "The Wrong Solution to the Teacher Shortage." *Educational Leadership* 60(8): 30-33.

Ingersoll, Richard M. February 2003. *Who Controls Teachers' Work? Power and Accountability in America's Schools.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Johnson, Susan Moore. March 4, 2005. "Supporting and Retaining the Next Generation of Teachers." NEA Visiting Scholars Series Research Brief. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. March 17, 2005. "The 'Simple Logic' of the Highly Qualified Teacher Provisions of NCLB." NEA Visiting Scholar Series Research Brief. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

McTighe, Jay and Steven Ferrara. 1998. *Assessing Learning in the Classroom.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

National Education Association. Spring 2004. "Excellence and Equity: Closing the Student Achievement Gap." A report prepared by NEA's Professional Standards and Practices Committee. Washington, DC: Author.

Orfield, Gary, Daniel Losen, and Johanna Wald. 2005. "Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis." *Harvard Education Publishing Group, Executive Summary.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Civil Rights Project.

Rudner, Lawrence M. and William D. Schafer. 2002. *What Teachers Need to Know About Assessment.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Safe Schools Manual: A Resource on Making Schools, Communities, and Families Safe for Children. 2005. Washington, DC: NEA Human and Civil Rights.

Short, Deborah and Jana Echevarria. 2004. "Teacher Skills To Support English Language Learners." *Educational Leadership* 62(4): 8–13.

Southeast Center for Teaching Quality. *Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions.* 2005. Chapel Hill, NC.: Author.

Stiggins, Richard J. 2003. *Balanced Assessment: The Key to Accountability and Improved Student Learning.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Stiggins, Richard J. 1998. *Classroom Assessment for Student Success.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Thurlow, Martha and James Ysseldyke. 2002. *Including Students with Disabilities in Assessments.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Think Big! The NEA Foundation: How to Get a Grant. Washington, DC: NEA Foundation. www.neafoundation.org/granthandbook.doc.

Valdez-Pierce, Lorraine. 2003. *Assessing English Language Learners.* Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Organizations and Web Sites

The NEA Web site on closing the achievement gaps contains articles and research on effective strategies to use in closing achievement gaps, as well as discussion boards, announcements, news items, professional development opportunities, and NEA products and resources. www.achievementgaps.org

The Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence provide a systems perspective for understanding performance management and for sharing best practices in education. http://baldrige.nist.gov/

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) is a research and development program focused on improving the education of students whose ability to reach their potential is challenged by language or cultural barriers, race, geographic location, or poverty. www.crede.org

Community foundations generally make smaller grants, but their gifts are often easier to get and are renewable. A community foundation locator is available at www.communityfoundationlocator.org.

Consortium for Educational Change is a network of Illinois School districts and professional organizations working to improve student achievement by assisting member districts and schools to become collaborative, high performing organizations. http://cecillinois.org/index.html

A number of federal agencies offer federal grants for education, technology, crime-prevention, or communications programs. A guide to all federal agencies is available at www.fedworld.gov/govlinks.html.

The Giving Forum features community-specific information about foundation giving and offers a variety of information about regional associations of grant-makers. www.givingforum.org/ralocator.html

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) has a database of legislative proposals including an education database ranging from accountability to vouchers. http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/educ_leg.cfm

National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators and National Black Caucus of State Legislators. 2005. *Closing the Gap—A Campaign Action Guide for Improving Educational Outcomes for Children.* http://www.nhcsl.org/policy-section.html.

The NEA Foundation encourages members and teams of members to apply for the NEA Foundation's Innovation Grants and Learning and Leadership Grants, which support high quality professional development, project-based learning, and break-the-mold innovations that raise student achievement. www.neafoundation.org

OPSCAN Surveys from NEA Research include 23 surveys, organized under 12 topic areas, that affiliate leaders can use to gather information on the opinions and priorities of members. http://connect.nea.org/opscan/index.html

The Public Education Network (PEN) is a national network of local education funds that work to improve public education, with a focus on poor and disadvantaged students. www.publiceducation.org

PEN Weekly News Blast is an electronic newsletter that offers a listing of grant opportunities for individual educators as well as students, schools, and other organizations. www.publiceducation.org/subscribe.asp

SchoolGrants shares grant information with PK–12 educators, providing online tips to those who need them and listing a selection of opportunities available to public and private nonprofit elementary and secondary schools and districts across the United States. http://www.k12grants.org/

Springboard Schools works collaboratively with teachers and administrators to provide a continuous improvement process using professional development, tools, and coaching to achieve and sustain results. www.springboardschools.org

APPENDIX: MODEL LEGISLATION

To establish a program to provide extended learning opportunities, including opportunities after school, on weekends and during the summer, and for other purposes.

January x, 2006

A BILL

Be it enacted by the xxxx and the xxxxx of the State of _____

Section 1. Short Title.

This Act may be cited as the 'Extended Learning Opportunities Expansion Act.'

Section 2. Findings.

The Legislature finds:

(1) Children need a safe, nurturing environment after school, on weekends and during the summer months.

(2) Schools are seeking to constructively and effectively use extended learning opportunities to reinforce and strengthen instructional efforts provided during regular school hours.

(3) High quality extended learning opportunities need to be expanded and improved to serve the growing number of families demanding these opportunities for their children.

Section 3. Purpose.

The purpose of this Act is to develop and expand programs which provide high quality extended learning opportunities, including opportunities provided after school, on weekends and during the summer months.

Section 4. Program Authorized.

The State Department of Education shall establish a program that develops and expands programs which provide high quality, extended learning opportunities after school, on weekends and during the summer months. The State Department of Education shall provide funds to eligible entities which have submitted an application described in section 5 and have such application approved pursuant to section 6.

Section 5. Application.

Eligible entities which wish to participate in the program described in section 4 shall submit an application to the State Department of Education at such time, in such manner and containing such information as the State Department of Education shall require. Such application shall include—

(1) A description of the program for which the eligible entity is requesting funding;

(2) A description of the academic component of the program and an assurance that such component is aligned with the academic instruction and content provided to children in public elementary and secondary schools in the State;

(3) A description of the qualifications of staff which the program has or will hire to operate the program;

(4) A description of the track record, if any, of the eligible entity in operating extended learning opportunities programs;

(5) A description of goals for the program, including academic goals for children participating in the program;

(6) An assurance that such eligible entity has conducted a needs assessment of the proposed service area of the program;

(7) The results of the needs assessment described under paragraph (6);

(8) An assurance that teachers and other education related personnel were consulted in the creation of the application;

(9) An assurance that the provider will not discriminate in employment decisions.

Section 6. Approval of Applications.

(a) Peer Review. The State Department of Education shall use a peer review process to approve applications submitted under section 5.

(b) Approval Criteria. The State Department of Education shall publish and publicly disseminate the criteria that will be used to approve applications submitted under section 5.

(c) Use of Peer Review. The State Department of Education shall use the results of the peer review process in making approval determinations.

(d) Schedule. The State Department of Education shall establish a schedule under which such determinations shall be made. Such schedule shall be available to eligible entities and the general public through the Internet website of the State Department of Education prior to an application period established by such Department under section 5.

Section 7. Uses of Funds.

Eligible entities which have applications approved under section 6 may use funds described under section 4 for the following purposes:

(1) Remedial education activities and academic enrichment learning programs, including providing additional assistance to students to allow the students to improve their academic achievement.

(2) Mathematics and science education activities.

(3) Arts and music education activities.

(4) Entrepreneurial education programs.

(5) Tutoring services (including those provided by senior citizen volunteers) and mentoring programs.

(6) Programs that provide after school activities for limited English proficient students that emphasize language skills and academic achievement.

(7) Recreational activities.

(8) Telecommunications and technology education programs.

(9) Expanded library service hours.

(10) Programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy.

(11) Programs that provide assistance to students who have been truant, suspended, or expelled to allow the students to improve their academic achievement.

(12) Drug and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, and character education programs.

Section 8. Evaluation and Audit

(a) Independent Evaluation.—The State Department of Education shall conduct an independent evaluation of the programs funded under this Act. Such evaluation shall—

(1) Assess the impact of the program on the academic achievement of students involved in such program; and

(2) Assess the progress made by such program in achieving the goals described in the application of the eligible entity.

(b) Audit.—An eligible entity which receives funds under this Act shall conduct an independent audit of the program funded under this Act.

Section 9. Dissemination.

The State Department of Education, based on the results of the evaluation described under section 8, shall disseminate promising and best practices of programs funded under this Act to eligible entities receiving funding under this Act and entities which are likely to receive funding under this Act. Such dissemination shall include the posting of such practices on the Internet Web site of such Department.

Section 10. Definition.

In this Act, the term 'eligible entity' means—

(A) A public school district or a consortium of such districts; or

(B) A non-profit or community-based organization (or a consortium of such organizations) which, for the purposes of administering the program described under this Act, is supervised by a school district.

To establish a Preschool and full day Kindergarten program, and for other purposes.

January x, 2006

A BILL

Be it enacted by the xxxx and the xxxxx of the State of _____

Section 1. Short Title.

This Act may be cited as 'The Prekindergarten and Full Day Kindergarten Act.'

Section 2. Findings.

The Legislature finds the following:

(1) Prekindergarten programs are essential to supporting the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of young children.

(2) Kindergarten programs are essential to ensuring the school readiness of children when they enter the 1st grade.

Section 3. Purpose.

The purpose of this Act is expand preschool and full day kindergarten opportunities for children aged three, four, and five.

Section 4. Program Authorization.

The State Department of Education (hereinafter referred to as the designated State agency) shall establish a program to provide for the development of –

(1) High-quality full-day, full-calendar-year universal prekindergarten for all children age 3 and 4; and

(2) Full day kindergarten program for all children age 5 in the State.

Section 5. Plan and Requirements.

(a) State Plan--The designated State agency shall develop a plan to implement the program described in section 4. Such plan shall include each of the following:

(1) A description of the universal prekindergarten program that will be established and how it will support children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

(2) A description of the full day kindergarten program that will be established and how it will ensure school readiness for such children.

(3) A statement of the goals for the universal prekindergarten and the full day kindergarten programs and how such goals will be measured through program outcomes and other means.

(4) A description of how the designated State agency will involve representatives of early childhood program providers that sponsor programs addressing children 3, 4, and 5 years old.

(5) A description of how the designated State agency will coordinate with existing State-funded prekindergarten programs, federally funded programs (such as Head Start programs), public school programs, and child care providers.

(6) A plan to address the shortages of qualified early childhood education teachers, including how to increase such teachers' compensation to be comparable to that of public school teachers.

(7) How the designated State agency will provide ongoing professional development opportunities to help increase the number of teachers in early childhood programs who meet the State's education or credential requirements for prekindergarten teachers.

(8) A plan to address how the programs will meet the needs of children with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and other special needs.

(9) A plan to provide transportation for children to and from the programs.

(10) A plan to ensure parents of children enrolled in the program are actively involved with and engaged in their child's education.

(b) Local Requirements.

(1) In General- An eligible program provider receiving funding under this Act shall--

(A) Maintain a maximum class size of 15 children;

(B) Maintain a ratio of not more than 10 children for each member of the teaching staff;

(C) (i) Ensure that all prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers meet State requirements for teachers under applicable State law; and
(ii) Document that the State is demonstrating significant progress in assisting such teachers on working toward a bachelor of arts degree with training in early childhood development or early childhood education;

(D) Meet all health and safety standards required for pre-kindergarten programs.

(2) Local Application- Program providers under this Act shall submit an application to the designated State agency under this Act containing the following:

(A) A description of the program to be provided.

(B) A statement of the demonstrated need for a program, or an enhanced or expanded program, in the area served by the eligible program provider.

(C) A description of the age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate educational curriculum to be provided that will help children be ready for school and assist them in the transition to kindergarten (as applicable to prekindergarten programs).

(D) A description of how the eligible program provider will collaborate with existing community-based child care providers and Head Start programs, as appropriate.

(E) A description of how students and families will be assisted in obtaining supportive services available in their communities.

(F) A plan to promote parental involvement in the program.

(G) A description of how teachers will receive ongoing professional development in early childhood development and education.

Section 6. Professional Development Set-Aside.

A designated State agency may set aside a portion of funding under this Act for ongoing development activities for teachers and staff at prekindergarten and kindergarten programs that wish to participate in the programs under this Act. Funds set aside under this subsection may be used for ongoing professional development—

>   (1) To provide prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and staff with the knowledge and skills for the application of recent research on child cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, including language and literacy development, and on early childhood pedagogy;

>   (2) To provide the cost of education needed to obtain a credential or degree with specific training in early childhood development or education;

>   (3) To work with children who have limited English proficiency, disabilities, and other special needs; and

>   (4) To select and use developmentally appropriate screening and diagnostic assessments to improve teaching and learning and make appropriate referrals for services to support the development and learning of children in such programs.

Section 7. Definition.

In this Act the term `eligible program provider' means a prekindergarten program provider that is—

>   (A) A public school;

>   or

>   (B) A Head Start program.

To establish a program to increase and enhance parent or guardian involvement in schools, and for other purposes.

January x, 2006

A BILL

Be it enacted by the xxxx and the xxxxx of the State of _____

Section 1. Short Title.

This Act may be cited as the 'Parent and Guardian Involvement Enhancement Act.'

Section 2. Findings.

The Legislature finds the following:

> (1) Parents or guardians are the first and most important teachers of their children.
>
> (2) Parents or guardians play a crucial role in the development of a child in their formative years.
>
> (3) Schools around the nation have found that parent or guardian compacts increase successful parent or guardian involvement in the education of their children.
>
> (4) A parent or guardian compact provides opportunities for parents or guardians and their families to learn how to help their children succeed in school.

Section 3. Purpose.

The purpose of this Act is to encourage and expand the adoption of parent or guardian compacts that further parent or guardian involvement and therefore learning in the public schools of the State.

Section 4. Policy on Parent or Guardian Compacts.

The State Department of Education shall establish a policy which requires each school to establish a process under which parents or guardians of a child enrolled in a public school in the State shall be provided an opportunity to enter into a school-parent or -guardian compact. Such compact shall commit the parents or guardians to assist and cooperate with the educational process of such child.

Section 5. Contents of Parent or Guardian Compact.

The parent or guardian compact described in section 4 shall describe how the school, the school district, and the parent or guardian will work together in a mutually supportive and respectful partnership to help the child succeed in school. Such compact shall include, at a minimum--

> (1) A description of the responsibility of the school and school district to provide a high-quality curriculum and instructional program in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables each child to meet the academic achievement standards established by the State;

(2) A commitment by the school and school district to assist and encourage active participation by the parent or guardian by doing all of the following:

    (A) Establishing a process that promotes meaningful communication between home and school on a regular basis.

    (B) Providing information to the parents or guardians on State academic standards for each grade and subject area.

    (C) Providing information to the parents or guardians on the expectations of the school and school district regarding the behavior of children.

    (D) Promoting the availability of school, school district, and community resources to strengthen school programs and their connection to the parents or guardians.

    (E) Supporting professional development opportunities for teachers and other staff to enhance understanding of effective parent or guardian involvement strategies.

(3) A commitment by the parents or guardians to share responsibility for pupil learning through:

    (A) Ensuring that the child arrives at school prepared to learn.

    (B) Fostering learning at home, giving appropriate assistance, monitoring homework, and giving feedback to teachers.

    (C) Attending school meetings.

    (D) Communicating regularly with teachers and other school staff, as needed, in a meaningful manner.

    (E) Familiarizing the parents or guardians with State, school, and school district academic standards for appropriate grade and subject areas.

    (F) Participating, as appropriate, in decisions related to the child and the programs of the school.

    (G) Engagement in other successful parent or guardian involvement activities directly related to increased learning.

Section 6. Parental Leave for School Activities.

(a) Leave Policy. An employee employed by an employer in the State is entitled to take paid leave, not to exceed three hours in any one-month period and not to exceed thirty hours in any academic year, for the purpose of attending parent-teacher conferences or in the case of an emergency. Such paid leave shall be in addition to any other paid leave provided by such employer.

(b) Maximum Time and Written Verification. An employer may require that leave be taken in a maximum of two-hour segments and that the employee provide written verification from the school or school district of the conference or emergency.

(c) Scheduling of Leave Time. An employee shall make a reasonable attempt to schedule conferences for which leave may be taken under this section outside of regular work hours. In scheduling conferences for which leave may be taken, the State Department of Education shall require schools and school districts to exercise best efforts to accommodate the schedules of parents and guardians of children.

(d) Notice of Leave. An employee taking leave described under this section shall provide the employer with notice of the leave at least one week prior to the date of the leave, except in the case of an emergency, including the written verification specified in subsection (b) of this section.

(e) Special Rule. Nothing in this section should be construed to prohibit an employer from granting to employees leave provisions or leave benefits that are greater than the requirements for leave as described in this section.

(f) Collective Bargaining Agreements. This section shall apply to the rights of employees and the obligations of employers subject to a collective bargaining agreement.

(g) Other Policies. This section shall not apply to an employer that has a written policy allowing its employees parental leave to attend parent-teacher conferences or other emergencies if the employer's written parental leave policy allows parental leave that is at least equal to the parental leave specified in this section.

(h) Definitions.

In this section—

> (1) "Academic year" means the period of time, not to exceed twelve consecutive months, allotted by a school for the completion of one grade level of study.
>
> (2) "Employee" means any person, employed for at least thirty hours a week who is the parent or legal guardian of a child enrolled in a public school in the State for students in kindergarten through high school.
>
> (3) "Employer" means a person who regularly engages the services of at least twenty-five employees at the same time and includes the state and all political subdivisions of the state.

To establish a policy of small class sizes and improved working conditions for teachers

January x, 2006

A BILL

Be it enacted by the xxxx and the xxxxx of the State of _____

Section 1. Short Title.

This Act may be cited as the 'Class Size Reduction and Improved Working Conditions Act.'

Section 2. Findings.

The Legislature finds that:

> (1) Class size has a direct impact on student achievement.
>
> (2) Reducing class size enables teachers to provide more individual attention to each student.
>
> (3) Closing the achievement gap will require that teachers have more opportunities to work with students needing greater assistance.
>
> (4) The state has a vested interest in ensuring that teachers be given the opportunity to reach each child through manageable class size.
>
> (5) Research shows that small class sizes have a significant impact on the educational outcomes for students. Smaller class sizes produce significant gains in reading, and narrow the achievement gaps.

Section 3. Purpose.

The purposes of this Act are to –

> (1) Reduce class sizes in the State to an average of 15 students per classroom; and
>
> (2) Improve teaching so that all students can learn and the achievement gaps close.

Section 4. Small Class Size Policy Authorized.

The State Education Department shall establish a policy under which classes in public elementary and secondary schools shall consist of not more than 15 students. Such policy shall require a proportionately lower number of students in programs for students with exceptional needs including children with disabilities and limited English proficient students. Such number for students with exceptional needs shall be calculated based on a weighted class size.

Section 5. Improved Working Conditions

(a) Survey. The State Education Department shall conduct a survey of working conditions in public schools and use the results to develop policies and programs on working conditions for public elementary and secondary teachers working in public schools in the State. The purpose of the survey is as follows:

    (1) To hear from teachers and administrators about what they identify as areas in need of improvement.

    (2) To understand what school characteristics appear to affect those perceptions.

    (3) To provide data on working conditions to local school leaders and state policymakers.

    (4) To determine if the conditions of teaching and learning have an impact on student performance.

(b) Contents of Survey. In developing the contents of the survey described under subsection (a), the State Department of Education in cooperation with the Governor's office shall include the following elements:

    (1) Time management.

    (2) Facilities and resources, including the quality of such facilities and the amount and quality of such resources.

    (3) Leadership.

    (4) Personal empowerment.

    (5) Opportunities for high quality and sustained professional development.

    (6) Instructional resources available for teachers and para educators.

To establish a program for the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers, and for other purposes.

January x, 2006

A BILL

Be it enacted by the xxxx and the xxxxx of the State of _____

Section 1. Short Title.

This Act may be cited as the 'Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act.'

Section 2. Findings.

The Legislature finds the following:

(1) The teaching profession is the cornerstone of society.

(2) The goal of teaching must be to provide the highest quality education to all students.

(3) The teaching profession must be composed of individuals who meet the highest standards.

(4) Teachers must assume expanded leadership roles and have the time, resources, and decision-making authority to provide the highest quality of learning for each student.

(5) Strong programs of teacher recruitment and retention are necessary to maintain and enhance the teaching profession.

(6) Recruitment efforts should emphasize the recruitment of underrepresented candidates and minority teachers and should include a policy of affirmative recruitment.

(7) Prospective teachers shall attend institutions accredited by the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Section 3. Purpose.

The purpose of this Act is to expand recruitment and retention efforts of high quality teachers, especially recruitment and retention of underrepresented and minority candidates, including through the use of mentoring and teacher induction programs.

Section 4. Policy on Diversity

It is the policy of the Legislature that public elementary and secondary schools and school districts adopt a policy of maximizing the diversity of its teachers by recruiting and retaining teachers from underrepresented backgrounds and minorities.

Section 5. State Department of Education.

(a) Needs Assessment -- The State Department of Education shall conduct a needs assessment of public schools and school districts in the State. Such needs assessment shall include:

      (1) A determination of the subject areas in which shortages of high quality teachers exist.

      (2) The professional development needs of currently employed teachers.

      (3) The capacity of institutions of higher education in the State to meet the recruitment needs of public schools and school districts in the State.

(b) Establishment - The State Department of Education shall establish a program of recruitment and retention of high quality teachers, including teachers from underrepresented backgrounds and minority teachers. The program shall include the following components:

      (1) A stipend of $xxx for teachers who have obtained certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

      (2) Financial and other incentives for teachers who choose to teach in hard to staff schools.

      (3) High quality professional development for currently employed teachers, including—

            (A) Professional development on research based methods of providing instruction and improving learning, including cultural competence.

            (B) Ongoing professional development on the use, integration and applications of technology in the classroom and other educational settings.

      (4) Teacher mentoring for first year teachers.

      (5) Grants and other forms of financial assistance to allow prospective teachers to pursue careers in education as well as allow currently employed teachers to improve and expand their skills and knowledge.

      (6) Support to improve and enhance teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education in the State, including—

            (A) Requiring the involvement of practicing and licensed teachers in the design, implementation, evaluation and systemic change of such programs;

            (B) Requiring the involvement of students who are preparing to teach in the evaluation and improvement of such programs;

            (C) Requiring the inclusion of courses in the liberal arts, subject or grade-level specialty, reading methodologies for the instruction of students with limited English proficiency, cultural competence, and professional studies that include learning theories, curriculum design, classroom management, behavior management, discipline, student assessment, school accountability, school law and teaching techniques in such programs;

            (D) Requiring a variety of field experiences throughout the preparation program culminating in clinical practice in such programs; and

            (E) Encouraging partnerships between such programs and school districts to improve the quality of instruction provided to prospective teachers.

<div align="center">

To improve data systems and their use by teachers and other instructional personnel, and for other purposes.

January x, 2006

A BILL

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Section 1. Short Title.

This Act may be cited as the 'Improved Data Collection and Record Keeping Act.'

Section 2. Findings.

The Legislature finds:

> (1) Reliable and accurate data is necessary to help schools, teachers and parents assess and improve the quality and method of instruction.

> (2) Data must be collected in a manner that reduces burdens on schools and teachers while maximizing the quality of information which can be derived from such data.

> (3) Teachers and the public need access to easily understandable and usable data on school and student performance.

> (4) Teachers, principals and other education personnel need additional professional development in using and understanding data and its role in improving instruction and student achievement.

Section 3. Purpose.

The purpose of this Act is to design, develop, and implement statewide, data systems to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, disaggregate, and use individual student data to improve the usefulness of such data to teachers and other staff responsible for making instructional and other education related decisions. This data shall be used exclusively for instructional and curriculum decisions made in the best interest of children and for professional development for their teachers and administrators.

Section 4. Data System.

(a) Plan. The State Department of Education shall develop a plan to design, develop, and implement statewide, longitudinal data systems to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, disaggregate, and use individual student data to improve the use of such data in instructional and other education related decisions. Such a plan shall include—

> (1) A requirement ensuring technical quality, including validity and reliability for the use of data from such systems.

> (2) A requirement that protects student privacy consistent with the Family Education Rights Protection Act and other applicable Federal, State and local laws.

> (3) A specific timeline when the State will have the improvements described in the Act developed and implemented.

(4) A requirement that promotes the generation, accuracy and timely use of data that is needed--

    (A) For States and local educational agencies to comply with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.) and other State and local laws; and

    (B) To facilitate research to improve student academic achievement and close achievement gaps.

(5) A requirement that such data systems be user friendly for teachers, parents, and students.

(6) A requirement that teachers (and other education related staff) in the State receive professional development on the use of the data systems developed under this section.

(b) Consultation. The State Department of Education shall establish a teacher and educational employee advisory committee for the purpose of advising the State on the design, development, and implementation of the data systems described in subsection (a). The Committee shall provide appropriate and timely recommendations to the Department throughout the design, development, and implementation of such systems. Such committee shall be appointed by the State Superintendent of Instruction not later than 180 days after the enactment of this Act.

Section 5. Professional Development.

The State Department of Education, in conjunction with school districts in the State, shall provide professional development to teachers and other education related personnel in public schools in the State on the use of such data systems and resulting data. Such professional development shall begin not later than 180 days after the completion of such systems and the resulting collection of data and shall include training on how to —

(1) Use the resulting data to improve instruction, especially for students who are not meeting State academic standards;

(2 Use the resulting data to improve instructional techniques;

(3) Integrate technology into the curriculum to improve instruction and learning; and

(4) Understand and use data systems.